PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1997–98

COMPRISING PERIOD
28 July—30 October 1997

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28 July 1997

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 299**

SIXTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1997–98

House of Commons

Monday 28 July 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

DEATH OF A MEMBER

Madam Speaker: I regret to have to report to the House the death of Gordon McMaster, the Member for Paisley, South. I am sure that Members in all parts of the House will join me in mourning the loss of a colleague and in extending our sympathy to the hon. Member's family and friends.

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

New Deal for Lone Parents

1. **Mr. Rammell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on support for single parents. [9028]

The Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women (Ms Harriet Harman): Last week, the Government launched the first stage of our welfare-to-work programme—our manifesto commitment to implement a new deal for lone parents. This is a pioneering programme which marks a radical new approach to welfare, bringing work, skills, opportunities and ambition to all those who until now have been left behind.

Mr. Rammell: I thank the Secretary of State for that response. In my constituency of Harlow, 60 per cent. of lone parents are unemployed, not through choice but because of the inadequacy of child care support. Is not adequate child care support absolutely essential in helping lone parents move from benefit into work? In the light of that, will my right hon. Friend explain how the Government intend to restructure the single regeneration budget to aid that process?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out that lone parents want to work rather than be dependent on benefit, but many of them say that they would be more likely to get work if there were more child care. That is why we promised in our manifesto that we would have a national child care strategy, which we have already started to implement. As well as increasing the child care disregard in family credit, which gives extra cash help to mothers moving off income support and into work, we have, as my hon. Friend rightly points out, said that, for the first time, child care provision will be an important focus for funds from the single regeneration budget. The new priority that the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has given to child care as part of economic regeneration is evidence that we are putting child care at the heart of our economic strategy.

Mr. Baldry: That was a statement.

Madam Speaker: It was much too long an answer.

Mr. Webb: With regard to lone parents who are unable to get off welfare and into work, and of whom there will presumably be several hundred thousand even after the new deal, will the Secretary of State confirm that, from next April, new lone parents on income support will have to live on £5 a week less than existing lone parents? What effect does she think that will have on the standard of living of the children in those families?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman well knows the proposals for the lone-parent premium and the one-parent benefit, which were debated in the House last week, but the clear message from lone parents is that they do not want to live on full-time benefits. They want to be in work, financially able to support themselves and their children. Our new deal for lone parents has started with an invitation to all lone parents with children of school age for an interview with a personal adviser, but, even in the first week after the launch of the new deal in eight areas, one of the things that have struck us—I shall report further to the House as the scheme proceeds—is how many of the lone parents who have rung up were not those who were invited, but those whose children are under five but who also want to be able to work rather than bring up their children on benefits.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Social Security Bill which we debated last week will implement a Conservative proposal to reduce the level of child benefit for lone parents. Even though the right hon. Lady opposed it previously, she is now pushing it through, but the point is that there is still a proposal to reduce the premium on income support for lone parents, which requires secondary legislation. Will the right hon. Lady tell us when she intends to introduce that, or does she have some other plans?

Ms Harman: That proposal will be brought forward shortly.

Mr. Burns: When?

Ms Harman: I have answered that question.

The hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) will note the report published this week by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which shows that widening inequality is largely the gap between households in which someone is in work and those without work. There are 1 million lone mothers bringing up 2 million children in households without work. It is because we want to tackle inequality and improve opportunities for those who have been excluded that we shall introduce our welfare-to-work programme for lone mothers.

Claimants (Improved Services)

3. **Mr. Andy King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the Government's plans to improve services to claimants by sharing information within her Department relating to claimants. [9030]

Ms Harman: Improving services to claimants to help rebuild public support for the social security system is central to our plans to reform the welfare state. It is unacceptable that claimants have to give the same information over and over again to different parts of the benefits system. Through the Social Security Bill, we shall take steps to remedy the matter.

Mr. King: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for her answer. Time and again, people have come to my surgeries in despair at the amount of time and energy that they are wasting in trying to find their way through the very complex and inefficient system that we inherited from the previous Government. Will she confirm that, on average, some people who appeal against decisions must wait six months for a decision, and that, in some cases, they must wait up to two years for a hearing? What will she do to tackle that intolerable situation?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend raises two important points: the amount of time that claimants must waste in providing the same information to different parts of the social security system; and the fact that claimants must, on average, wait six months before their appeal is decided. In many cases, those appealing against a benefit decision do not receive a decision for more than two years, and that is totally unacceptable. One of the objectives of our Social Security Bill is to cut the time required for people to have an appeal heard and decided.

Mr. Tredinnick: Is not one related problem the amount of time required for claimants to reach benefits offices on the telephone? Does the Secretary of State have any proposals to improve communications between members of the public and her offices? If so, will she institute a review into the matter?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The Government need thoroughly to modernise the relationship between the social security system and claimants, and we intend to do so. The way in which the social security system currently operates—requiring claimants to provide, time and again, the same information to different parts of the system—wastes the time of staff and claimants and taxpayers' money.

Claimants subsequently have to ring a benefits office if they lose track of what stage they have reached in dealing with the system about one of the five benefits that they may be receiving. I am holding the forms necessary to notify one single change in circumstance—that a lone mother wants to move off income support because she has found a job. A lone mother must fill in all of these forms to communicate to the Child Support Agency, the local authority and those dealing with family credit and income support the one bit of information that she has a job. If she subsequently tries to telephone to discover what on earth has happened to any of the forms, she probably will not be able to get through.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the best ways of improving services to claimants would be to guarantee that they will have ready access to Benefits Agency offices? Is she aware that there is concern that, if the Government—as anticipated, under what is called the prime scheme, the private sector resource initiative for management of the estate—announce that they will dispose of benefits offices as heritable property and lease them back, it will be the prelude to a rationalisation process in which Benefits Agency offices will be closed? Will she give an assurance that that will not happen, and pay attention specifically to the needs of claimants in rural areas, who are sometimes already far removed from the nearest Benefits Agency office?

Ms Harman: We are absolutely determined to modernise and improve social security services, not only for those who live in towns and cities but for those in rural areas. The opportunities provided by extended telephone use and new technology mean that there is no reason why claimants should have to waste half their lives trying to deal with different parts of the system. We are ensuring that we shall improve the system so that it wastes less time for claimants and staff, wastes less money for taxpayers, provides a prompt and efficient service and makes the right decision the first time.

Mr. Blizzard: I welcome my right hon. Friend's drive to reduce paperwork in the benefits system. Will she also consider the needs of disabled people who, under the benefit integrity programme introduced by the previous Government, are required to fill in a 33-page questionnaire? If they do not, a home visit can then be followed up by a tribunal. Will my right hon. Friend consider whether that is really necessary, especially in the light of reports from my local disablement information and advice line office, which is inundated by cries for help from disabled people to whom it cannot always respond because of the sheer weight of paperwork from the Benefits Agency?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend raises two points. First, he referred to people with disabilities being required to fill in dozens of different forms that require the same information and then having to repeat the exercise. I addressed that in earlier answers. We share his concern, which affects people claiming benefit as a result of disability as well as pensioners and the unemployed.

Secondly, my hon. Friend referred to benefit fraud. We are concerned to get benefits to people who are entitled to them because of incapacity or disability. However, we are also concerned that those who are not entitled to benefits should not receive them. We want to rebuild public support for the social security system. People will not support a system that wastes claimants' time with hundreds of forms. Nor will they support a system that they know is open to abuse whereby those who are not entitled to benefits receive them.

Pensions

4. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to increase the number of people with fully funded second-tier pensions. [9031]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new post as social security spokesman for the Liberal Democrats. As part of our pensions review, we shall examine ways in which we can further support and strengthen the existing framework of occupational pension provision where that is necessary. We shall consult widely on our proposals for stakeholder pensions that will offer secure, flexible and value-for-money funded second pensions for those who cannot join an employer's occupational pension scheme. They will be particularly aimed at those on low earnings or with intermittent patterns of employment, for whom personal pensions are usually unsuitable.

Mr. Rendel: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his initial remarks and for his support in general for second-tier pensions. Does he agree that it is certainly regrettable that the Chancellor in his Budget introduced measures that will discourage people from taking out fully funded second-tier pensions?

Mr. Denham: Pensions are a long-term investment and they depend on the success and the strength of the economy. It was therefore right for the economy and for future pensions provision that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor took measures to remove biases against investment and to increase the level and quality of long-term investment. That will produce the wealth on which pensions can be paid in future.

Mr. Pike: Is it not time to do something for pensioners such as those in the Bellings pension fund scheme who will not get what they paid for because of the fraud that was committed by the former directors of the scheme? When they retire, those pensioners will get only about 30 per cent. of what they expected.

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is right to raise that problem. The new regulatory authority for occupational pensions came into operation at the beginning of April. I hope that the measures in the Pensions Act 1995 will strengthen the protection of pension scheme members. However, we shall take stock of the practical workings of that Act to identify any areas where further improvement is necessary.

Mr. Viggers: Is the Minister aware that many of my constituents thought that they had fully funded pension schemes until 2 July and they are now affronted to discover that they have lost 15 to 20 per cent. of the benefit of those schemes? Is he aware that my constituents are furiously angry that the Government are now promoting second pensions when the Chancellor removed many of those benefits on 2 July?

Mr. Denham: Those of the hon. Gentleman's constituents who have defined benefits schemes will have their benefits protected by the schemes. Those in personal pension schemes who are approaching retirement would in the normal course of events have already seen their investments switched away from equities either automatically by some providers or, in other cases, on the advice of financial advisers. In any case, I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the performance of the stock market since January, as that should give him some reassurance.

Mr. Wicks: Does my hon. Friend recognise that some of the hardest-working people in the country are not in the waged economy, but are carers for elderly people and for others with disabilities? They are often denied access to a decent pension. What plans does he have to ensure that carers in Britain—our most responsible citizens—can have a decent old age with a decent pension?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is right to point out that some people work hard for society, but are not in a position to pay into a funded second pension. That is why, as part of our pensions review, we shall consult widely on our proposals for a citizenship pension, to explore ways in which those who exercise responsibilities as carers can develop rights to a decent second pension and avoid the fate of retirement on to means-tested benefits—a prospect which faces far too many people today.

5. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if her Department will write to those people with personal pensions informing them of recent or prospective changes to their pensions. [9032]

Mr. Denham: The package of measures in the Budget will promote an environment in which pensions will flourish. It will encourage investment, stable economic policies and sustainable economic growth. Pensions are a long-term investment. Responsibility for advising policy holders lies with individual providers and financial advisers, within the guidance offered by the regulators.

Mr. Davis: The Minister should be able to answer my question more quickly than that—a simple yes or no will do. In view of what he has just said, do the Government welcome the fact that a number of companies are considering whether to move from final salary pensions to money-purchase pensions?

Mr. Denham: Many factors govern the decision of employers as to what type of pension scheme to offer. The right hon. Gentleman will be well aware that there was much speculation before the Budget about whether schemes would switch to contracting out on a different basis. I am sure that he agrees that what matters is the quality of the pension on offer, rather than the detail of the scheme.

New Deal for Lone Parents

6. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the Government's new deal proposals to help lone parents into work. [9033]

Ms Harman: Our manifesto committed us to introducing a new deal for lone parents. That has already begun in eight areas, including Sheffield—in which my hon. Friend's constituency lies—where it is offering hope and opportunity for 10,000 lone mothers on income support, who are bringing up 20,000 children.

Mr. Michie: I welcome the Government's programme of removing the barriers that prevent lone parents who want to work from doing so. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that a lone parent who finally takes a job but who then, for reasons that were unforeseen initially, cannot continue with that employment will not be financially disadvantaged relative to their previous situation?

Ms Harman: There is no question of people being penalised if they leave their work. Lone parents who go to work are, on average, £50 a week better off than they were on benefit. That is why so many of them want to work. Part of the job of the personal advisers to lone parents, who have been appointed already in eight areas, including Sheffield, is to assist lone parents when they start work, helping them to get their child care and benefits sorted out and advising them during their first few weeks and months in work to ensure that they manage to keep their work rather than falling back to income support.

Mr. Brazier: Bearing in mind the fact that some of those who pay taxes for such child care are low-earning families, which group of lone parents does the right hon. Lady think will benefit from the extension of the child care disregard from £40 a week to £100 a week?

Ms Harman: The child care disregard is designed to increase the affordability of child care, as part of our national child care strategy. We want more people to be trained with child care qualifications to improve the supply of child care workers. We also want to increase the number of child care places. We shall do that through the single regeneration budget, as a start, and with funds from the midweek lottery. That will benefit not only lone parents, but low-income families in which the woman is working and wants to ensure that her children are safely looked after while she is at work.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

7. **Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she expects the review of the reduced earnings allowance to be completed; and if she will make a statement. [9034]

Mr. Denham: We have completed the review of reduced earnings allowance. Those affected by the transfer of over-pension-age recipients of reduced earnings allowance to the retirement allowance 16 months ago were harshly treated by the previous Government. Many people lost up to £30 a week in benefit with little or no advance warning, and without the transitional protection which we proposed at the time.

Regretfully, however, we have concluded that we cannot remedy that injustice without breaking our manifesto commitment to keep within current spending totals. We have also concluded that retirement allowance is the right benefit for those recipients who are over retirement age. We are determined that reduced-earnings-allowance recipients will receive sufficient advance warning in future. The Benefits Agency will remind people receiving REA of the forthcoming transfer to retirement allowance well in advance of retirement.

Ann Clwyd: Well, I am very sorry to hear that answer, particular given that my hon. Friend described the situation in which such people were left as harsh. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said to me in a letter last year that those people had been left in an appalling situation. We are talking about 20,000 people, many of whom live in the poorest parts of the country. Certainly in Wales, many are widows and living on very low incomes. They have already taken a 75 per cent. cut in their income through the withdrawal of the reduced earnings allowance. If it was wrong last year, why is it right this year?

Mr. Denham: I have recognised the hardship caused by the previous Government's action. I am sure that my hon. Friend will recognise the difficulty in putting right every single injustice perpetrated by that Government. To restore reduced earnings allowance to those who are transferred on to retirement allowance would cost about £45 million a year and would require us to cut expenditure elsewhere. This Government have not been afraid to take the difficult decisions necessary in order to stick within our manifesto commitments.

Mr. Garnier: As the Minister fairly said, it was right that those who were about to retire should receive advance warning of changes of plans. Where, therefore, in the Labour party's manifesto will pensioners and future pensioners find a reference to advance corporation tax?

Madam Speaker: I am not clear whether that was a substantive question. If the hon. and learned Member wants an answer, perhaps he will table a substantive question, to which I am sure that he will be given a response.

New Deal for Lone Parents

8. **Mrs. Brinton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the impact of the welfare-to-work proposals as they affect single parents. [9035]

Ms Harman: The new deal for lone parents offers help to every lone parent with school-age children to give them support and advice to help them off benefit and into work. Following the launch on Monday in the first eight areas of our new deal, we shall monitor progress in those eight areas and report back to the House.

Mrs. Brinton: I thank my right hon. Friend for her reply. Is she aware that, in my constituency of Peterborough, 22 per cent. of families with dependent children are single parent or lone-parent families? Does she, like me, deplore the comments of Conservative Members, especially those of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who has tended to blame single parents for all the evils in society rather than the disastrous policies of the previous Government? Will she be prepared at some time in the future to visit my constituency so that she can tell lone parents how Labour's policies will benefit them?

Ms Harman: I shall certainly visit my hon. Friend's constituency and talk to the personal advisers who are working with lone mothers there. She is right to remind the House that the previous Government simply blamed lone parents. They left 1 million on income support, bringing up 2 million children, which left those families with a low standard of living and the taxpayer with a high bill. That is why we have a welfare-to-work programme to improve the standard of living for lone mothers and their children.

Mr. Baldry: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the best way in which to deal with differentials in income in our society, as identified by the Institute for Fiscal Studies today, is not by increasing rates of taxation or introducing penal rates of taxation but by helping people who are not in work to get back into work?

Ms Harman: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The best way to deal with inequality in income is through education and work opportunities. Those are the findings of the Institute for Fiscal Studies report and are two key planks of the Government's policy.

Income Support

9. **Kali Mountford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the reasons why pensioners do not claim income support. [9036]

Mr. Denham: Our review of pensions is looking at the central areas of pensions insecurity for elderly people. Pensions are of key importance to people's lives and it is vital to build a sustainable consensus on the way forward so that everyone can look forward to a secure and dignified retirement.

We are committed to examining ways of helping up to 1 million pensioners who are entitled to income support but do not claim it. We are commissioning research to establish why they do not take up their benefit entitlement.

Kali Mountford: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that an estimated 1,150 pensioners in my constituency do not take up pensions? When I contacted my local DSS office, I was told that it had no strategy to encourage the take-up of pensions. Is it not the case that pensioners have no choice, contrary to what the Conservatives claimed when they were in power, and that we need a strategy to ensure that people who feel that a stigma is attached to means-tested benefits are encouraged to take up their entitlement?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is right. The previous Administration took the view that the only explanation for non-take-up was choice by poor elderly pensioners. The figures that she has given from her constituency show why it is so important that we understand the obstacles that those pensioners face in claiming the benefit so that we can examine ways forward.

Mr. Yeo: Does the Minister understand that the main reason why pensioners do not claim income support is that they are not eligible for it because they receive a second pension? Therefore, will he confirm, as a matter of simple fact, that the value of the pensions—which millions of personal pension plan holders looked forward to receiving—were substantially devalued by the Chancellor's smash-and-grab raid on 2 July?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in both assertions. Pensioners who are entitled to income support but who do not claim it do not have a second pension or, if they do, it is not enough to take them above income support level. The hon. Gentleman would do better to express some concern about why that situation exists, as we are doing.

Mr. Coaker: Does my hon. Friend agree that some pensioners do not claim the benefits to which they are entitled because the Conservative party created a culture in which people believe that anyone who claims benefit is a scrounger? What we need to do is to persuade pensioners that, far from scrounging, they are claiming something for which they have paid all their lives and on which they have a legitimate claim.

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is right. One of the problems that we have to overcome is the legacy of 18 years in which everybody who claimed any benefit was labelled a scrounger. That is one of the reasons why proud elderly people are reluctant to claim the benefits to which they are entitled.

Mr. Burns: The Government's aim is to encourage pensioners to claim the benefits to which they are entitled. How does that square with the nasty and vindictive clause 70 in the Social Security Bill which will reduce the back-dating claim time from three months to one month? If more pensions are claimed, what assessment has been made by his Department of the amount of public money available and how much has been set aside to meet those claims?

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already set out, in last week's debate on social security, why we intend to have a social security system that operates efficiently and effectively in the interests of those who use it. That is what we shall do.

Minster for Women

10. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement about the priorities of the Minister for Women. [9037]

Ms Harman: My priorities as Minister for Women are to open a new dialogue between Government and women, and to deliver the Government's commitments to women. We have already established a powerful Cabinet sub-committee for women, which will meet for the first time this afternoon and will put women's concerns at the heart of the Government. The sub-committee will ensure an effective cross-departmental approach to issues of concern to women.

Mr. Bayley: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many women feel more disconnected from politics and government than men do? At the election, 101 Labour women Members of Parliament were elected, compared with 13 Tory women and three Liberal Democrats. What will my right hon. Friend do to build on the opportunity of by far the largest representation in the House that women have ever had to make politics and government more relevant to women?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend is right. Women feel more disconnected and alienated from the work of political parties and Government than men do. Now that we have the opportunity provided by the presence of an unprecedented number of female Labour Members of Parliament, it is our responsibility to establish a new dialogue with women. We can do that in two ways: through better communications with women's organisations and by reaching out to women across the country by new means—deliberative opinion polls, citizens' juries and representative people's panels. Many women see no reflection of their views in the House of Commons, and no connection between their lives and Government. The new Labour Administration will put that right.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Where in the priorities of the Minister for Women will come the case of the child carer in my constituency who tells me that, as a result of the changes in the Budget, she will now have to contribute an extra £20 a month to a personal pension scheme?

Ms Harman: Many people who took out personal pensions were hard done by at the hands of the last Government, whose policy allowed people to be encouraged to opt out of good occupational pension schemes and to be mis-sold personal pensions. Many of those people have not even been compensated for their loss of income in retirement. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is really concerned about increasing the connection between the work of Government and women in his constituency.

Mr. Gray: Is the Minister for Women aware that, at the last general election, more public schoolboys than women stood as Labour candidates? What steps will she take to increase the number of women Members on the Government Benches?

Ms Harman: The last general election was a great step forward in terms of women's representation. We have an unprecedented number of women Members. We still have further to go, however. We want to ensure that women understand that their views are listened to in Government. I am not referring just to women on the inside track, or women involved in organisations, but to all women. For 18 years, we had a Government who thought that women's demands were there to be resisted and ridiculed, but all that has now changed. Opposition Members should recognise that the tide of opinion has moved past them on this as well as many other issues.

Pensions

11. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the impact on the state earnings-related pension scheme of the abolition of the advance corporation tax credit. [9038]

Mr. Denham: The Budget measures will encourage stable economic policies, sustainable economic growth and the long-term performance of investment and of British companies. Companies providing occupational pension schemes will benefit from the reduction in corporation tax and other measures announced in the Budget to encourage investment. The advance corporation tax credit change will have no direct impact on SERPS, which is not a pre-funded scheme.

Mr. Sayeed: Now that the Labour Government have increased the cost of pensions by more than 15 per cent., do they intend to encourage or compel people to save for second-tier pensions? If so, why should people do that when they do not know whether a Labour Chancellor will rob them yet again in the future?

Mr. Denham: Opposition Members are not in a good position to talk about the value for money that people receive from their pension schemes, given the large number of people who lost out through the mis-selling of personal pensions—which the last Government encouraged—and the high fees and charges that have been visited on many people with low incomes and intermittent earnings through personal pensions. When we carry out our pensions review—in which we shall consider ways of extending the coverage of value-for-money funded second-tier pensions—we shall set out to ensure that savers get real value for money for their hard-earned savings, and can benefit from that when they retire.

Mr. Flynn: Has not the Budget removed the unfair circumstances in which people in SERPS did not have the advantage of a handout from the taxpayer, unlike those with personal pensions? When examining new pension schemes, however, would it not be better for us to build on the advantages of SERPS? At worst, 2 per cent. of its charges are spent on administration. Could not that advantage be built on with a new, funded SERPS, since in the case of present private pensions at least 25 per cent. of charges are spent on administration? Would it not be better to build on SERPS, as a funded scheme, rather than go into private pensions?

Can my hon. Friend also explain one puzzle? Why do we hear that one of the people who was responsible for mis-selling personal pension schemes on a large scale is to advise the Government? Will experts on national insurance schemes be included to advise the Government on their pensions review?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend asked a lot of questions, which I doubt whether Madam Speaker will allow me to answer in full. In our manifesto, we are committed to retaining SERPS for those who want to remain in it. Clearly, it is for individuals to decide which is the best form of provision for them. My hon. Friend is right to focus on a central issue, which is whether people will get value for the money that they put aside as savings. How will that be reflected in their final pension and will they feel that they have had a good deal at the end of the day? It is clear that many people who have set out to save for their pensions in recent years do not feel that they have had a good deal for the money that they have put aside.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The hon. Gentleman knows from previous statements that the changes in the Budget affect the rebate, which will affect SERPS and is likely to leave people in SERPS rather than wanting to come out. On that basis, will he say once and for all whether the pensions review will consider SERPS in total and whether, if it concludes that SERPS should be phased out, the Labour Government will do so? Or, will they stand by their manifesto commitment to do no such thing?

Mr. Denham: Our pensions review will study the future of all second-tier pension provision, but the statement made in our manifesto is clear. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the rebate. I must point out to him that his Administration spent about £17 billion more—largely from the national insurance fund—to encourage people to opt out into personal pensions, than will ever be saved in the future on SERPS expenditure. I can assure him that we will aim to protect the integrity of the national insurance fund as we take our review forward.

Incapacity Benefit

12. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to improve services to those claiming incapacity benefit. [9039]

Mr. Denham: In our terms of reference for our comprehensive spending review, we announced that we would review the purpose and nature of all the major components of the social security system, including sickness and disability benefits. A key priority will be to simplify the complex system of provision for sick and disabled people, which includes incapacity benefit, with particular emphasis on removing the barriers in the system that currently prevent people who are able and wish to work from doing so.

Mr. Dismore: Does my hon. Friend agree that the previous Government's approach to disabled people and those with long-term ill health was simply to write them off as unemployable, when many of them would value the opportunity of a job? Does he agree that the country really needs a Government who are committed to looking at people as individuals and not as statistics, and who are looking to give everyone who is able to work the encouragement and opportunity to do so, to provide a better life for themselves and their families?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is right. Through no desire of their own, many sick and disabled people are trapped in a benefits system that encourages sickness and encourages people to stay out of work. We aim to remove the barriers inherent in the system, which prevent people from maximising their ability to work and will, therefore, be developing similar welfare-to-work proposals for the sick and disabled to those already announced for lone mothers.

Mr. Flight: Will it not be more difficult for people to claim incapacity benefits as a result of the stricter medical tests proposed in the Social Security Bill?

Mr. Denham: We all agree that the procedures that we use should be fair and that there should be a proper assessment of an individual's capacity for work. The focus should be on assessing that capacity, rather than having a benefit system that simply says to so many people, "All the incentives are to make yourself unavailable for work."

Mr. Swinney: Following the Minister's point about fairness in the system of allocating incapacity benefit, will he give me some advice that I can pass on to those of my constituents who previously received incapacity benefit and whose health has not materially improved, but who have lost incapacity benefit and now find that they have to wait nine months for independent tribunals to examine their case?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point and I hope that we will enjoy his support during the passage of the Social Security Bill, one of whose aims is to simplify and streamline the system of appeals and appeal determination, while retaining the essential elements of independence and fairness.

Fraud Hotline

13. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations she has received concerning the social security fraud hotline. [9040]

The Minister for Welfare Reform (Mr. Frank Field): Of all the representations the Government have received, only one letter has been critical of the fraud hotline.

Mr. Evans: I welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box. Does he agree that the social security fraud hotline was a successful initiative by the previous Government? To enhance its success in future, will he ensure that British Telecommunications plc and other telephone book operators allow prominent display of the hotline in their pages? Will he also have discussions with BT and other public phone box operators? I cannot go past those boxes without failing to notice that they seem to be packed full of cards advertising all sorts of interesting and unusual services—I hasten to add that I am not interested in using them myself. Will the right hon. Gentleman encourage the companies to clean up their act and ensure that the social security fraud hotline number is given a prominent position in all public phone boxes in the country?

Mr. Field: During the Attlee Government, a Minister was asked a whole series of questions to which he replied: yes, yes, no, yes, but not necessarily in that order. The answers to the hon. Gentleman's questions are: yes, yes and yes.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Minister aware that when the hotline was established during the previous Parliament, I rang and complained about the fraud committed by Ministers—the then Prime Minister, the then Secretary of State for Social Security and a number of others—who in so many ways undermined pensions and social security provision? When I gave the names of the Ministers concerned, including that of the former Prime Minister, I was told that those complaints could not be taken up. My views on the subject remain the same, as, no doubt, do my right hon. Friend's.

Mr. Field: I presume that the Department got my hon. Friend's letter muddled and included it as the one complaint against the hotline, so the answer to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) is that the Government have received no complaints about the fraud hotline.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the right hon. Gentleman consider the feedback to people who have made a complaint? They see neighbours apparently defrauding the system and then have no way of knowing that action has been taken. I recognise the problems of sub judice and confidentiality, but will he look carefully at ways of ensuring that there is proper feedback, or at least that everybody is told that every case is looked at? If prosecution follows or someone is found to be at fault, surely the public should be told what action has been taken.

Mr. Field: Yes.

Long-term Unemployed

14. **Mr. Truswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has for getting the long-term unemployed off social security benefits and into work. [9041]

Mr. Field: By the middle of next year, the Government will bring on stream two policies aimed at helping the long-term unemployed back to work. There will be a job subsidy for that group. In addition, those wishing to participate in up-to-year-long education courses that are related to their work aspirations will be allowed to do so.

Mr. Truswell: I thank my right hon. Friend for that response. What work is his Department doing in conjunction with other Departments to ensure access to high-quality—I stress, high-quality—employment opportunities for my constituents and to move away from the rag bag of often Mickey Mouse schemes to which they were subjected by the Conservatives?

Mr. Field: The Government's intent is clear: we are aiming for high-quality employment opportunities. If people gain opportunities in the private sector, the chances of their long-term employment prospects being enhanced are greater and that is where much of our effort will go.

Mr. Willetts: Does the Minister agree that one way of helping people into work is through family credit, which is paid as a benefit, often to the mother? Does he also agree that that contrasts with tax allowances or the earned income tax credit, which are payable to a person in work, often the father? Does the right hon. Gentleman recall his strong arguments when he was in opposition in favour of giving the benefit to the mother rather than the tax allowance to the father? Is that still his view?

Mr. Field: Given the views of the hon. Gentleman, clearly when one sinner repents, there is great delight in heaven; when two repent, goodness knows the extent of the enjoyment there.

Social Security Tribunals

15. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on welfare reform relating to social security tribunals. [9042]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Keith Bradley): We are determined to reduce the current delays and complexity in the appeals system. On 9 July, we introduced the Social Security Bill, which paves the way for modernising the delivery of social security. The Secretary of State will assume responsibility for the administration of the appeals system; set and publish demanding targets for the appeals service to meet; and report on the results.

Mr. Watts: I thank my hon. Friend for that full and honest reply. If we are to have a modern, efficient and fair system, does he agree that the Social Security Department needs to do more to ensure that people take up the benefits to which they are entitled? What action will his

Department take to ensure that all those who are eligible receive that to which they are entitled? Can he assure me that action will be taken as quickly as possible?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments. We want to introduce a modern, efficient and effective social security system. We also want to ensure that everyone is aware of his or her rights and that the information they require to ensure that they take up their entitlement is available to them. We will debate those matters as the Social Security Bill goes through the House and I assure my hon. Friend that his points about take-up will be considered then.

New Deal for Lone Parents

16. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations she has received from organisations representing lone parents on the impact of the welfare-to-work proposals announced in the Budget. [9043]

Ms Harman: The national lone parent organisations—Gingerbread and the National Council for One Parent Families—have warmly welcomed the new deal for lone parents, which we announced in the Budget. They are working with us on that programme as it gets under way.

Those organisations know, as we do, that lone parents want the opportunity to work to provide a better life for themselves and their children.

Mrs. Campbell: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the warm welcome given by lone parent organisations in my constituency for her new deal for lone parents which she launched in my constituency last week? Will she also consider, however, that some parents are still experiencing difficulties, namely, those who work anti-social hours and who therefore have to use informal kinds of child care, which at present are not eligible for the child care disregard? Will she take that into account when considering the effect of her scheme?

Ms Harman: Certainly, we shall need to look at the opportunities available for child care and combining it with work governed by inflexible hours. As my hon. Friend will know, we are establishing a national child care strategy which will help to improve the affordability of child care through the child care disregard. That strategy will also help the provision of child care through after-school clubs, which will be funded by the national midweek lottery, and the provision of more places in those clubs and at nurseries through the use of the single regeneration budget.

It is certainly true that in terms of child care provision for those who work ordinary hours or more flexible hours, Britain's children are Europe's poor relations, because lone mothers in other European countries are able to work to support themselves and their children, and thus enjoy a better standard of living than their counterparts in this country. The absence of appropriate child care in this country is one reason why we have twice as many lone parents dependent on benefit as our European colleagues, and half as many in work.

Benefit Entitlement (Young People)

21. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to change benefit entitlement for those aged 16 to 25 years. [9049]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We want to ensure that all young people are in employment, training or education rather than dependent on benefit. That is why we are planning to replace youth training for 16 and 17-year-olds and enhance other opportunities for such young people. Through our proposals in the new deal, we shall be investing in the future of the young jobless aged 18 to 25, helping them to improve their employability and allowing them to participate fully in the labour market.

Mr. Baker: Can the Minister tell the House how young people who have been excluded from benefit for periods of up to two or four weeks and who are unable to find employment are expected to live during that time?

Mr. Bradley: Our priority is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to take up one of the four options available in the new deal. The arrangements will ensure that every support and opportunity is given to young people to take up one of the options. We shall pursue that with the Employment Service at that time to ensure that those opportunities are available to all 18 to 25-year-olds.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Can the Minister give an absolutely clear account to the House of how the additional £200 million welfare-to-work moneys will be spent—how much on the 18 to 25 programme, how much on the raising of the earnings disregard, how much on training child minders? There is considerable suspicion in many quarters that the Secretary of State for Social Security has already spent the available £200 million several times over.

Mr. Bradley: The hon. Gentleman may be muddled in his figures. The £200 million relates solely to lone parents and the help and support that they will be given. They will be given support by personal advisers, who will consider possibilities and career prospects for them. That money will help with child care, which is essential if lone mothers are to return to work, and all the other arrangements that will be necessary. The £200 million is in the first phase of our roll-out programme to help lone parents to get back to work.

Pensions

22. **Mr. Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the availability of value-for-money pensions for those on low income. [9050]

Mr. Denham: Occupational schemes provide good-quality second pensions for half of all employees, but some personal pensions can be poor value for those on low incomes and with intermittent patterns of work. As part of our pensions review, we will consult widely on how best to take forward our proposals for stakeholder pensions to ensure that those without good-quality occupational pension schemes have access to secure, flexible, value-for-money second pensions.

Mr. Quinn: Does my hon. Friend agree that what the people of Scarborough, Whitby and the nation need is a flexible second pension, which will mean that they need not rely on a means-tested pension when they reach old age, and that they can have a proper standard of living and afford a proper existence in retirement?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is right. His constituents and many other people throughout the country want an end to the situation whereby, if they join a pension scheme for a few years and then have to leave work, a high proportion—in some cases 50 per cent. or more—of their savings can be eaten up by fees and charges and is not available to provide a pension when they retire. If that happens, they are likely to be in poverty on retirement and the state is likely to have to meet, through means-tested benefits, the cost of providing them with a basic level of financial support. That is why I believe that our proposals are so important and long overdue.

Mortgage Interest Payments

23. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will change the system of benefit payments in respect of mortgage interest payments to monthly payments. [9051]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are undertaking a general review of housing benefit and housing finance, but, at the present time, we have no plans to change those specific arrangements.

Mr. Pike: Does my hon. Friend recognise that, although there may be no immediate plan to make a change, if he discusses the matter with benefit officers it will be found that there will be tremendous advantages in making 12 payments annually instead of 13 four-weekly payments, which cause great confusion to the recipient and to the bank or building society concerned?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. As part of our general modernisation of social security, we shall study any method that streamlines the system. I am grateful for his comments on that matter, and can assure him that I will include it in the general review of which I have spoken.

Child Support Agency

24. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the changes she has announced relating to the Child Support Agency. [9052]

Mr. Keith Bradley: As indicated when we recently debated the Child Support Agency, we intend to look closely at all aspects of the work of the Child Support Agency to ensure that it provides an efficient and effective service. Our key objectives for the agency during the coming year are to sort out cases faster, tackle the backlog of work and pursue fathers who avoid paying. With this in mind, an additional £15 million a year will be invested in the agency from 1998-99 specifically aimed at getting more absent parents to pay. This is expected to result in an extra £121 million in maintenance payments.

The Social Security Bill, introduced on 9 July 1997, also contains proposals to simplify and speed up the child support decision-making process.

Mr. Gibb: Can the Minister state precisely how the £15 million will yield the £120 million extra savings which he just said it would yield?

Mr. Bradley: That money will be used across the board to improve the efficiency of the Child Support Agency. We shall look particularly at out-of-hours work, including the telephone system, to try to ensure that people have better access to the agency so that their problems can be sorted out quickly and efficiently, and to ensure that parents pay the maintenance that they should pay.

Income Support

25. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were on income support at the latest available date. [9053]

Mr. Keith Bradley: In August 1996, nearly 5.6 million people were receiving income support, almost double the number in 1979. That is the legacy which we inherited from the previous Administration. We now have the opportunity for a fresh start. Most people who are capable of work want to work. We shall modernise the social security system to help them do just that.

Mr. Skinner: Is my hon. Friend aware that one thing the Government will have to do is ensure that work is provided? We cannot get work out of thin air. We can modernise and privatise those offices until the cows come home, but there are large areas of Britain—inner cities, old coalfield areas and other ex-industrial areas—where literally 30 or 40 per cent. of the people are without work. Many are on income support and not on unemployment benefit. The Government must turn their attention not only to welfare-to-work schemes but to providing work.

Mr. Bradley: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. As a Member of Parliament representing an inner city, I recognise the problems that he identifies. We need to re-skill, re-educate and ensure that real opportunities in employment are available throughout the country. We need to look particularly at areas that have been devastated by the previous Administration's policies.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Foreign Secretary has just answered a written question setting out the criteria that will be used in considering licence applications for the export of conventional arms. As you are aware, it is a matter of considerable importance, which has already been the subject of two speeches by the Foreign Secretary outside the House. Was it right for the right hon. Gentleman to announce a change of policy in that way? Is not it yet another example of the Government's contempt for Parliament? Is not smuggling the statement out three days before the recess just a crude attempt to deny the House an opportunity to question the Foreign Secretary on its content? Are you, too, powerless in the face of this further display of arrogance by this high-handed Government?

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Having seen the press reports on that matter, particularly about third-world sales, I wanted to question the Foreign Secretary, not least because of the Indonesian situation, when the previous Government—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am interested not in speeches nor in issues of policy but in the point of order to me.

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. This subject was discussed at discursive length this morning in the comfortable ambience of the "Today" programme, whereas hon. Members on both sides of the House would like to question the Foreign Secretary on the economic, industrial and diplomatic consequences of a drastic change in policy, as this apparently is. Having inquired at the Foreign Office, we were told that no review was to be announced on the Floor of the House; we had to go to the Vote Office and get a copy of a written question— presumably written by the Foreign Office, but it was signed by the hon. Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms) and answered in a written text.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am ready to respond to those points of order. First, however, I should like to hear what one or two other hon. Members have to say; I shall not hear points of order from throughout the House. I shall take two more points of order from the Labour Benches.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to the point of order of the former Home Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), the Chamber is becoming like an echo chamber, Madam Speaker. I used to make such points when the previous Government were in power. I, too, deplore the use of the media to get a message across, but I had a maxim about that. I used to say that if a Government spokesman announced a fresh policy on "Today" and repeated it on "Newsnight" the same night, it was policy.

Madam Speaker: I will take one more point of order from the Government side.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Having been in opposition for so long, we sympathise with the members of the former Government, who are finding the painful experience of opposition so difficult. We indeed need statements from the Government, especially on the decision of the House of Lords last week, which again found that the former Home Secretary had broken the law. His comments must be treated as those of a recidivist.

Madam Speaker: Order. I am seriously interested in the two points of order that were raised originally. As the House knows, that is not a matter for the Speaker. When a Minister has information to give to the House, that is done by means of an oral statement or by means of a written answer to a question. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) and the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark), who raised the matter with me originally, were both senior Ministers in a former Government and know full well what the procedure is.

I mean to be helpful in the matter, in which I know that there is considerable interest. I remind the House that we have three hours on Wednesday morning for an Adjournment debate in which such matters can be raised, providing that Members are here and keen enough to do so.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will recall exchanges about "Yesterday in Parliament". You informed the House that you intended to write to the BBC. Obviously, you did so, but I do not expect that you received a positive response, bearing in mind the way in which the BBC is being run at present. Will you be good enough to tell us whether you have received a reply?

Madam Speaker: I have received a reply. I make no comment on it, but I have put copies of the correspondence in the Commons Library for hon. Members to see for themselves.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I do not know whether you saw the weekend papers or listened to the radio this morning. Announcements have been made in the press over the weekend, on the radio this morning and by way of a written answer to a parliamentary question, stating that Government policy on the roads programme has been changed, without a statement being made to the House. Have you received any approaches from the Government to make a statement about the points that have already been leaked to the media?

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) is right. The Minister's office told hon. Members whose constituencies were affected that a package would be available in the Vote Office at 3.30 pm, and that hon. Members concerned would have letters on the Board at 3.30 pm. That has not happened, yet the press is in possession of the facts. Have you had any requests for a statement to be made on the matter?

Madam Speaker: I have had no requests for a statement to be made on the matter, but I know that there has been rather a full written answer, which

[Madam Speaker]

presumably is now available. I understand that hon. Members whose constituencies are geographically linked with the areas in question will have all the information. If that is not the case, I shall see to it as soon as I leave the Chair.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I cannot take the matter any further.

Mr. Chope: I have just been outside the Vote Office, trying to get information about the matter. Even a Labour Member who is extremely concerned about the decision on the Birmingham northern relief road cannot get access to his own Government's plans.

Madam Speaker: I have just said that as soon as I leave the Chair, I will make inquiries. It is my understanding that letters are available. I have another hour's duty to do in the Chair, but perhaps someone in authority will go and find out on my behalf precisely what the position is and report to me; otherwise I shall do so myself.

Finance Bill (Allocation of Time)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee),

That the Report [24th July] from the Business Committee be now considered.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

Report considered accordingly.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee),

That this House doth agree with the Committee in its Resolution.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

Following is the report of the Business Committee [24 July]:

That—

(a) the order in which proceedings on consideration are taken shall be New Clauses, New Schedules, and amendments to Clauses 1 and 2, Schedule 1, Clause 3, Schedule 2, Clauses 4 to 17, Clause 49, Clauses 18 to 23, Schedule 3, Clauses 24 to 34, Schedule 4, Clause 35, Schedule 5, Clause 36, Schedule 6, Clauses 37 to 41, Schedule 7, Clauses 42 to 48, Clauses 50 to 53 and Schedule 8;

(b) the allotted days which under the Order [14th July] are given to the proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be allotted in the manner shown in the Table set out below and, subject to the provisions of that Order, each part of the proceedings shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the third column of that Table.

TABLE

Allotted day	*Proceedings*	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
First day	New Clauses, New Schedules and amendments to Clauses 1 and 2, Schedule 1, Clause 3, Schedule 2, Clauses 4 to 17 and Clause 49.	10.00 p.m.
Second day	Remaining proceedings on consideration	9.00 p.m.
	Third Reading	10.00 p.m.

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

[1st Allotted Day]

[Relevant documents: The Minutes of Evidence taken before the Treasury Committee on Monday 21st July, Tuesday 22nd July and Wednesday 23rd July (HC169-i to iii).]

Not amended (in the Committee), and as amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 4

Low cancer–risk part–renewable blended diesel

'.—(1) After section 1 of the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979 (Hydrocarbon oil) there shall be inserted the following section—

"*Low cancer-risk part-renewable blended diesel*

1A.—(1) Notwithstanding the provisions of section 6 (Excise duty on hydrocarbon oil) and section 11 (Rebate on heavy oil) of this Act, in respect of low cancer–risk part–renewable blended diesel—

(a) the rate of duty for the purposes of section 6 shall be £0.3758 a litre; and

(b) the rebate of duty for the purposes of section 11 shall be £0.0258 a litre less than the rate at which the duty is for the time being chargeable.

(2) For the purposes of this Act 'low cancer–risk part–renewable blended diesel' means fuel of the description in Schedule 2B to this Act."

(2) After Schedule 2 to that Act there shall be inserted the following Schedule—

"SCHEDULE 2B
LOW CANCER–RISK PART–RENEWABLE BLENDED DIESEL

1. Low cancer–risk part–renewable blended diesel is fuel which consists of—

(a) a blend of heavy oil containing not less than 22 per cent. by volume of kerosene which when blended conforms to the specification in paragraph 2; and

(b) not less than 3.8 per cent. and not more than 15.0 per cent. by volume of methylester which is derived from rapeseed oil which contains not more than 0.02 per cent. by weight of free glycerine and which conforms to such other specifications as the Commissioners may direct.

2. The specification referred to in paragraph 1 is a blend of heavy oil—

(a) of which not less than 60 per cent. by volume and not more than 72 per cent. by volume distils at a temperature of 250°C;

(b) of which not less than 90 per cent. by volume distils at a temperature of 290°C;

(c) which has a density of 15°C of not less than 813 kilograms per cubic metre and not more than 819 kilograms per cubic metre;

(d) which has a minimum cetane number of 49;

(e) which contains not more than 0.0015 per cent. by weight of sulphur;

(f) which contains not more than 11.25 per cent. by volume of aromatic hydrocarbons and not more than 0.05 per cent. by volume of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (containing three or more carbon rings); and

(g) which conforms to such other specifications as the Commissioners may direct."

(3) This section shall come into force on such day as the Commissioners of Customs and Excise may by order made by statutory instrument appoint.'.—*[Sir Michael Spicer.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.39 pm

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 33, in clause 11, page 7, line 26, at end insert—

'(4A) After section 6(2) of the 1979 Act, there is inserted—

"(2A) The Secretary of State may, by order made by statutory instrument, provide for duty of excise on hydrocarbon oil to be charged at a lower rate than that specified in subsection (1) above in rural areas; but no rate lower than that in force on 1st July 1997 may be specified under the terms of this subsection.

(2B) An order made under section (2A) above shall be laid before Parliament in draft and approved by resolution of each House before being made.".'.

No. 26, in page 7, line 28, leave out '2nd July' and insert '25th November'.

Sir Michael Spicer: To be completely safe, I must say that I am president of the Association of Electricity Producers, although that is a very indirect interest. In fact, I have no interest relevant to the new clause. I tabled the new clause on behalf of a constituent and it is the second time that I have raised the matter on behalf of that constituent.

The purpose of the new clause, which is quite long, is to give fuels whose fumes can create cancer the treatment that exists in tax law for fuels that produce high-sulphur emissions or those that produce heavy carbon dioxide emissions. The fume dealt with in the new clause is produced by polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, known as PAH. Can the Government confirm that the PAH content of fuel emissions is cancerous in its effects? There have been many studies of those emissions and the clear indication is that they are cancerous, but it would be good to have confirmation from the Government that that is the case.

I am very much aware that no Government would agree to a new clause that was specific to any company's interest; that would be quite wrong and would involve hybridity. The new clause, however, has been couched precisely with that point in mind and would have a completely generic application if accepted by the House. The new clause deals with a process that blends refined rapeseed oil with low-sulphur diesel. That generic technique, which is now well established and can be used by anybody who wishes to do so, would, because it meets a gamut of objectives in terms of cleaner air, benefit from the new clause.

Are there other ways in which to achieve those objectives? During points of order, we heard that the Government, on the "Today" programme, said that their way in which to deal with road pollutants was not to build any more roads. Presumably, if we did not have roads, we could not have cars. That seemed to be the way in which they intended to deal with these problems. The new clause is another way, and it is well established.

[Sir Michael Spicer]

Clean air objectives have been dealt with through the tax system. The previous Finance Bill introduced the inducement to reduce high-sulphur fuels, and there is a discriminatory tax arrangement designed with that in mind. If the Government are serious in their attempts to reduce pollutants from fuels, they should give some priority to dealing with emissions that may be cancerous.

Do the Government accept that the PAH content in fuel is cancer bearing? Will they confirm the assurance given by the previous Administration, that there would be a full review of all detrimental emissions from fuels and that a full review would be made of the Government's approach to noxious emissions? I hope that we shall not end up with some emissions being dealt with through the tax system while other more dangerous emissions are ignored.

As we have used the tax system in the past to deal with the problem, there is an onus on the Government to explain carefully, if they decide not to accept the new clause, what they intend to do about dangerous emissions and what their general policy is on the taxation of noxious emissions. Do they accept that a distortion in the system that produces tax disadvantages for certain types of emission and not for others is the correct way in which to proceed?

3.45 pm

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): I listened carefully to the remarks of the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer); I wish to take up amendment No. 33, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Morgan). The amendment is designed to provide a mechanism to enable the Government to vary the proposed increase in petrol duty, to compensate for the increased costs that will be suffered by those who live in rural areas. The issue has already been discussed, but it is important that the Government should have the opportunity once again to reflect on the proposals that are set out in the amendment.

The costs of the additional increase in petrol duty introduced by the Budget would increase the burden on those who live in rural areas by about £60 a year. That is on top of the £300-a-year increase that was introduced by the previous Conservative Government, through their commitment to an increase in petrol duty by an additional 5 per cent. on top of inflation.

The new Labour Government have added to that burden, and we seek through amendment No. 33 to encourage the Government to take a step back from the previous commitment. There is an undeniable case that rural areas are disadvantaged in this instance, and I shall provide some information on the subject.

The Highlands and Islands development board, in one of its publications in 1987, argued that

> "a car in a remote area may be both highly unreliable and barely affordable but nevertheless essential to survival and any households without a car in remote areas, must be at a severe disadvantage."

The study went on to examine the greater dependency of people in rural areas on the use of a car. It showed that on average 57.5 per cent. of households in Scotland had access to a car, whereas in the highlands and islands, which is the principal rural area in Scotland, the average was 68.5 per cent. It was 68.3 per cent. in Grampian and more than 70 per cent. in the northern isles.

It is interesting to contrast those figures with the dependence on and utilisation of public transport in rural areas. The contrast makes the burden clear. It is estimated that in the United Kingdom 3.66 per cent. of the population travel to work by train and 9.85 per cent. travel to work by bus. In the highlands and islands, 6.6 per cent. travel by bus and 0.65 per cent. by train. Access to public transport in rural areas is not as good or convenient as in city and urban communities. It is clear that in rural areas the burden of petrol duty is much greater than elsewhere, and dependence on the car is much more significant in all respects.

Over the weekend, I conducted a number of surgeries in the highland Perthshire area of my large rural constituency. Complaints and problems were brought to my attention by those who were seeking to use public services such as nursery education and primary school facilities, or other public services that involved substantial car journeys.

One lady was contemplating travelling 300 miles each week to take her young child to a nursery in Dunkeld. The increased burden that will be brought about by the proposed increase in duty will be formidable for that lady. Given the impact of increased transport costs in rural areas, people who live there are faced with a considerable burden. In many constituencies in the north of Scotland, local businesses, post offices, general stores and other small shops supporting life in the rural areas are haemorrhaging away, because of the spiralling costs of obtaining produce and supplies for sale.

The Government have suggested that the increase in petrol duty is being imposed on the wisest advice in respect of the environment. Certainly, travelling around London it is clear to me that there is a huge environmental problem caused by the over-use of cars and by the congestion that they cause. It is, however, unfortunate that the Government have tried to justify the increase in petrol prices on environmental grounds. It will punish rural areas even though it is dressed up as an environmental measure.

The Government need to pursue a long-term environmental strategy. Indeed, some of its details may have been announced by the Deputy Prime Minister during the past few minutes—who knows? Such a strategy will have to tackle congestion, among other issues, but it must not do so at the expense of fragile rural areas, not just in Scotland, but in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Petrol prices are already high in those areas.

My last piece of evidence comes from an analysis published in the *Petroleum Times Energy Report*, which shows that the average price per litre of unleaded petrol in Scotland was 61.76p in June 1997; whereas the average price in England was 58.6p. That clear disparity of price is only exacerbated by the heavier dependence in rural areas on the use of the car. I urge the Government at this late stage in the passage of the Finance Bill to think again about that measure because of the damage that it will undeniably do to already fragile rural communities.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells) *rose—*

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Would it be in order, Madam Speaker, for me to speak at this point?

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In no way do I want to inhibit my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who I know has other points to make, just as he did in Committee.

I want to speak to the amendment in my name, No. 26, which we were not able to debate in Committee because of the operation of the guillotine. We did touch on the increase in hydrocarbon duty—but not on the biggest effect that it will have on people in business: the fact that these large increases are to be introduced not from the usual date of the Budget, which is November, but from 2 July. That represents an extra five months' duty; it went partly unnoticed at the time of the Budget, but it has certainly been noticed by the victims of that large tax increase in the weeks since.

The fact is that, on the day of the Budget, the Chancellor imposed a 4p-a-litre tax increase on all who use road fuel—for those still used to gallons, that means an 18p-a-gallon increase. That represents a 6 per cent. increase above and beyond the rate of inflation, which is higher than what had been planned by the previous Government.

When we were in government, we signalled that there would be an annual real increase in duties, to show what our intentions were. We did so for environmental reasons, and to give the automobile industry a chance to design fuel-efficient engines and equipment to meet the challenge of extra hydrocarbon duties.

Without any warning or mention in the manifesto, however, the new Government have increased petrol and diesel duty by 6 per cent. in real terms; most significantly, they have brought forward the increase by five months. Taken together, those two factors will raise an extra £730 million this year. The Government have, without warning, imposed a three quarters of a billion pounds extra tax increase through that petrol and diesel duty hike.

Since Budget day, there has been an immediate increase for all motorists. I emphasise the word "immediate" and shall return to it, to contrast it with a number of relief measures that the Government have carefully postponed. All the pain is immediate, while some of the relief is delayed. This tax increase affects not only all motorists but anyone who relies on transport of any sort. I shall deal with the effect on rural areas in a moment.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the previous Government were very keen to persuade motorists to use their cars less, and that their strategy was to increase fuel duties? If he does not agree with such increases, how does he suggest that we persuade the world to stop global warming and achieve the targets for reducing CO_2 emissions?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman raises a matter which goes a little wide of the debate. I would love to engage with him in a wider environmental debate, but that would be out of order. People are indeed fairly attached to their cars. There is much evidence that increases in fuel duties do not necessarily lead people to switch to public transport, which is perhaps what lies behind the hon. Gentleman's question. The point that I am making, and with which I do not think the hon. Gentleman would disagree, is that yes, we did have a policy of increasing fuel duty, but the reason why the new Government have raised the rate of increase and brought it forward by five months has less to do with environmental aims than with raising money.

The effect of the increase on rural areas was outlined by the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney), and I agree with much of what he said. I represent a rural area, and a car is frequently not a luxury but a necessity for people living there. We must remember that not only cars but trains and buses will be affected by the increase in duty—in other words, public transport will also be hit. I know from first-hand experience in my constituency that many people are already regretting taking at face value Labour's promise, made during the election campaign, not to raise taxes.

The big and immediate effect of the increase is on transport, but domestic heating will also be affected. The Government have made much of the fact that they are cutting the rate of VAT on domestic fuel by 3 per cent., but the timing is interesting. That cut, modest as it is, does not come into effect until September. We discovered in Committee that there is a significant clawback of that benefit from low-income groups in particular—there will be a lower uprating of pensions and other benefits next April because of the cut in VAT. The modest benefit does not come into effect until September; why, therefore, have the Government brought forward to the date of the Budget itself the increase on heating oil which will affect many of the same people?

In summary, people are already being affected by many of the tax increases introduced by the Chancellor on Budget day. He announced 17 tax rises in general, but only one was promised in the manifesto. He did indeed promise us a windfall tax when in opposition, but when he was making plans for the windfall tax, he must have been making plans for the other 16 tax increases, including this huge extra burden on motorists and others.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House how many of the previous Government's 22 tax rises were in the 1992 Conservative party manifesto?

4 pm

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We dispute the hon. Gentleman's arithmetic in calculating 22 tax rises. He alleges that there were 22 tax rises during our five years in government, but perhaps he would like to reflect on the fact that, in their first four or five weeks, the Labour Government have introduced 17 tax rises. If they continue at that rate, we shall be well into three figures by the next general election.

The Prime Minister, before the general election, promised not to increase tax. On 21 September 1996, his exact words were:

> "We've no plans to increase tax at all".

More recently—in January 1997—the Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

> "It's my aim to get the burden down for ordinary people".

The Chancellor has since discovered that ordinary people use transport. Even if people do not use their own car, they use public transport, and both forms of transportation have been affected by the Government's tax increases. Many people heat their homes with oil, and many have pensions—which I shall not elaborate on now, because I realise that we shall debate that issue tomorrow. So-called ordinary people have been hit by 17 tax increases.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a danger of the

[Mr. Geraint Davies]

economy overheating and that, given that danger, the fuel tax is very welcome within the Budget's balanced portfolio of changes? Will he tell the House what changes, if any, the Conservatives would have made to fuel duty?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I tell the hon. Gentleman straight that we would not have produced this Budget and, therefore, would not have introduced the huge extra increase in duty on heating oil, petrol and diesel. If he is right and the economy is overheating—the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said that it is—it is all the more surprising that the Chancellor did not try, as a general Budget strategy, to take money directly out of consumer expenditure. We know—as does the hon. Gentleman, because he was a member of the Standing Committee that considered the Bill—that the Chancellor's main tax-raising measure affected not current consumer expenditure but pension funds, thereby hitting long-term savings and not current consumer expenditure. If reducing such expenditure was the Chancellor's strategy, he went about accomplishing it in a pretty stupid way.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Dawn Primarolo): The right hon. Gentleman has been going on about heating oil and price increases. Does he accept that kerosene is the predominant heating oil, and that the Budget did not increase excise duty on it?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No; the hon. Lady is a little out of date. Kerosene—or paraffin, as it is sometimes called—is no longer the predominant heating fuel of those on benefits. Just as many of them, if not more, use heating oil for heating their hot water or—with central heating—their homes. As from Budget day, the duty was increased. The hon. Lady has not answered the curious conundrum whereby she is happy to delay until September the VAT reduction on domestic fuel, whereas the Chancellor made the duty increase on heating oil effective on Budget day—thereby emphasising a point that I have already made.

Mr. Bennett: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I shall give way once more to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bennett: Are not those crocodile tears? How many people on low incomes does the right hon. Gentleman suggest are running central heating at this time of year? Does not he expect most of them to turn off their central heating system between now and September?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, I do. However, it may come as news to the hon. Gentleman that many people use the same fuel for heating water. They take baths, they wash their hands and they heat water for cooking. I am amazed by the ignorance sometimes displayed by Labour Members about how so-called ordinary people live. All the extra costs affect people now. As we sit in the Chamber, the additional tax on fuel is affecting our constituents, and I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is apparently unaware of that.

The tax increase on petrol, diesel and various oils does not just affect individuals; it is a massive extra cost to industry. Industry is the main user of diesel. Most lorries, buses and trains use diesel, which has increased in price by more than 9 per cent. Directly or indirectly, that affects the price of just about everything that is transported. It is a big extra industrial cost, as well as affecting individuals who use buses and trains. It also affects competitiveness. We have been promised a White Paper, a review or discussion document about competitiveness in the British economy. The Government could have made a start by not increasing the burden on the competitive sector of the economy through large tax increases.

The trade sector of the economy has been most squeezed since the election as it is exposed to international competition. In particular, the export industries and the manufacturing sector have been hit by the strength of the pound. They will also suffer most from a direct tax on one of their most important raw materials. That has no doubt contributed to stock market movements since the Budget. Shares in the financial and banking sectors, the retail sector and importers have increased in value, while those in manufacturing industry, the engineering sector and exporters are relatively low, as those industries have been hit by the Chancellor's monetary policies and the tax rises since Budget day.

There is also a general effect on inflation and the retail prices index. That further twist to inflation has not yet been reflected in the RPI. However, between the date of the election and now there has been an increase in the actual or signalled rate of inflation. That is hardly surprising, as one of the first things that the Chancellor did in office was to weaken his inflation target. We had a target of 2½ per cent. a year or less. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), the previous Chancellor, had met that target by the time we left office. The incoming Chancellor weakened the target to 2½ per cent. plus or minus 1 per cent. That sent a signal to the world that he would tolerate higher inflation. In addition, he failed to damp down any consumer boom that he identified in the economy—another missed opportunity—and increased inflation by his action in the Budget. The duty increase has still to feed through into the economy.

Jacqui Smith (Redditch): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that it is not the toughness of the inflation target that is most important, but the toughness of the action taken to achieve it, and that in many ways my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has already shown his willingness to take tough action, particularly through the independence that he has given the Bank of England in monetary matters?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I quite agree with the hon. Lady that it is no good having a target unless one is tough about meeting it. Having set a looser inflation target, the Chancellor signalled that he would be rather relaxed in his efforts to meet it by producing an inflationary Budget. The figures are quite eloquent. A report in the *Financial Times* says that, according to the Office for National Statistics, the Budget will

> "add a further 0.79 percentage points to the 'all-items' retail price index".

The same article points out that the last Budget of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe added only 0.39 percentage points to the index. So there we have it. The Chancellor not only weakened his target, but set about breaching it.

The Budget forecasts in the Red Book project a breach of the inflation target. The Chancellor accepts in his arithmetic that he will not—

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a judicious blend of fiscal and monetary policy is needed to meet the inflation target? Relying purely on fiscal policy could advance a possible recession, by creating the need to increase interest rates too high for the demand in the economy. We are heading in that direction.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am not a Keynsian, but I accept that fiscal policy has a part to play. It should not work in the opposite direction to monetary policy. Although interest rates should bear the main strain of keeping inflation under control, the lesson from countries such as Germany is that success comes from having a low-inflation culture, in which all the levers of economic management—fiscal policy and monetary policy—point in the same direction. We have not achieved that under the new Government. The separation of fiscal policy, which remains in the Treasury, from monetary policy, which now goes to the Bank of England, has within it the seeds of a considerable bust-up. The Budget was not in tune with the inflation target laid down by the Chancellor, even though—I repeat—that target is looser than the one that he inherited.

My concluding point concerns the effects on public services of the tax increase, particularly the fact that it is being brought forward by five months. From the day of the Budget, all services that use transport will cost more. There is a 4p-a-litre increase for all police cars, all ambulances, all school buses, all meals on wheels, the national health service and social services. All those services are already experiencing higher costs. There is no extra money for that. The Chancellor has almost made a fetish of the fact that his cash targets remain the same. It is true that, for the financial year starting next April, he has raided the reserve to allocate some more money to two items of public expenditure—education and health—but there is nothing for law and order, local government or any other public services. For the current financial year, which ends next March, there is not a penny piece of extra public money to fund services, even though—again, this is all in the Red Book—they face the inflationary consequences of the Budget.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): My right hon. Friend is touching on an important point. Is there not a serious danger of the public being bamboozled? They have been led to believe that the increases from the contingency reserve for health and education next year will buy more teachers, doctors or operations, adding to the output of those public services. It has not been explained to the public that a significant portion of that money will go on increased fuel costs and the consequences of the minimum wage—costs imposed on those services by the Government.

4.15 pm

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend puts it very well. What the Chancellor has done—the fuel increases are just one part—is to increase the cost of all public services while providing no extra money. That is a real expenditure reduction, which is already occurring.

The House should accept not just my word but that of the House of Commons Library, which has produced some very interesting figures that show that there is a real public expenditure reduction of £3 billion in the current financial year, rising to £5.25 billion next year. That is because of the extra inflation that the Chancellor is now projecting—part of which he has caused as a result of the Budget—which is colliding with the fact that there is no extra cash.

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on the International Monetary Fund report concerning the Budget?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There is nothing that I would like to do more, but I do not know whether the Chair would allow such a diversion into the IMF report. I shall just say that the IMF spotted the fact that we have incipient overheating on our hands, yet the Chancellor chose not to use the Budget as an opportunity to correct that through fiscal tightening. To go on a little from the IMF report, the only way in which he did attack consumers directly was in the most inflationary way possible, by the immediate increases in indirect taxation. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman will derive much comfort from the IMF report to counter what I have just described.

There we have it. We saw on Budget day a large and immediate tax increase levied on motorists of all sorts, especially those in rural areas, who will have to bear the increase without any way of switching to other forms of transport—notwithstanding the fact that many of the alternative forms of transport, such as buses and trains, are also hit by the duty increase.

We have seen how the increase works through into higher industrial costs and damages competitiveness, especially in the sector most exposed to world competition, which is trying to export. We have also demonstrated that, by feeding through into general inflation in the public services, unmatched by any extra cash to compensate, the increase will have a highly damaging effect on public expenditure in the years ahead.

For all those reasons, I invite the House to support amendment No. 26, which seeks at least to limit the damage, by pushing back to November the increase in hydrocarbon duties. The amendment will not halt the damage completely, but at least it will bring some respite to the hard-hit sectors that are the first but not the only victims of the new Labour Government.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I wish to speak to amendment No. 26, which was tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and relates to the timing of the fuel duty increases. They would, of course, have been enacted in November, rather than almost five months earlier in the July Budget. A 6 per cent. increase in fuel duties introduced five months early probably amounts to an increase of about 7 or 8 per cent. in real terms on a year-on-year basis. That is a pretty swingeing increase in fuel duties in one year.

The increases hit particularly those in rural areas and, more particularly still, poor people in rural areas who have to rely on their cars to obtain the absolute necessities of life at, for example, the post office or their local doctor's surgery. Those who are relatively affluent will not be deterred from using their cars.

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

The Government should be implementing a mixture of "carrot" and "stick" measures. They should be trying to encourage people through fiscal measures such as those in clause 11—some of which are to be welcomed, as I shall briefly explain—as well as encouraging people and heavy goods on to public transport.

In my constituency, we have opened two rural stations and I am battling to open a third. We should press for such measures to encourage the use of public transport. Another initiative in my constituency is a community bus. The scheme is organised by the community and funded by various Government bodies and through fund raising. The bus is driven by a rota of volunteers, and its schedule is tailored to the needs of the community. The scheme has expanded and now runs three or four buses, having started with one. Sadly, the swingeing increase in fuel duty will increase the scheme's running costs. I ask the Financial Secretary to exempt good community schemes from future increases in fuel duty or allow them to claim a rebate, because we should encourage them.

The increase in fuel duty is 6 per cent. in real terms, or 6 per cent. plus inflation. If we assume that the rate of inflation over the longer term is some 3 per cent., the increase is some 9 per cent. That means that fuel duties will double, in nominal terms, in seven years; that is a swingeing increase. I urge the Financial Secretary to consider the effect that the increase will have on poor people, especially those in rural areas.

As I have said, I welcome some aspects of clause 11, especially the encouragement of ultra-low-sulphur diesel. Through fiscal and other measures, we should be able to encourage—in a reasonably short time—all diesel users, including heavy goods vehicle drivers and car drivers, to switch to low-sulphur diesel. We all know the effects of the sulphur pollution that belches from the back of unserviced HGVs and cars, and it is possible to see the particulates and the white smoke and to smell the sulphur. We should encourage a universal switch to ultra-low-sulphur diesel, through fiscal measures, as we did with unleaded petrol. Ten years ago, the market for unleaded petrol was around 10 per cent. Today, it is some 90 per cent.

There is now no case for super-unleaded petrol, as the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) knows because he was a member of the Environment Select Committee which considered it. An environmentally friendly clause 11 would have introduced a differential in the rate of duty on ordinary unleaded petrol compared with super-unleaded petrol. Such a measure could be considered for a future Budget.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wells mentioned the inflationary effect of clause 11. One reason behind amendment No. 26—to delay the increase in fuel duty—was to try to mitigate that effect. The increase in fuel duty will have an effect on the price of all service and delivery goods. Huge numbers of motor cars, vans and HGVs will experience an increase in costs. Whether that is inflationary in the long or short term, when it eventually feeds through into the economy, is a matter for speculation. The notes on clauses suggest that the measure, which will raise some £300 million extra, will push inflation up in the short term by 0.25 per cent., but if duty goes up year on year, the cumulative inflationary effect will be much greater. That must be taken into account.

It is all very well to tax the motorist out of existence, but certain sectors of society will be especially adversely affected, including the poor in rural areas. It is all very well for an urban-dominated Government to ignore those people, but those who live in rural areas are often some of the poorest in the land. They depend on their motor cars as a necessity and the Government have a duty to consider their plight in future Budgets.

Mr. Swinney: The previous Government increased petrol duty, which had a damaging effect on rural communities. Did the hon. Gentleman oppose that?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman is talking about. He is probably talking about Norman Lamont's 1992 Budget. If he will clarify his question, I will answer it.

Mr. Swinney: The previous Government increased petrol duty by 5 per cent. over and above the inflation rate. The present Government have compounded that by increasing it by a further 1 per cent. The measure introduced by the last Government had a very damaging effect on rural areas.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: We can argue about semantics. We raised the duty by 5 per cent. The figure is now 6 per cent., but, in real terms, it is up to between 7.5 and 8 per cent., and each percentage rise causes a little more damage. I ask the Government to consider the effect that is caused over a period. This is a fairly swingeing increase—but I do not want to be provoked into speaking at length.

The Government could consider innovative ways of encouraging people to use public transport, on a "carrot" rather than a "stick" basis. In any of our major cities, queues of cars with only one occupant belch out smoke from unwarmed engines. Fiscal measures to encourage people to share cars could be introduced, along with a host of measures to encourage the return of heavier goods to the railways.

Some innovative suggestions have been made. Perhaps we could give special fiscal concessions to the drivers of lorries that, by means of special wheels, can go straight from the roads and on to the railways without the need for cross-handling of goods. I have seen that working effectively in north America. There could be a uniform business rate holiday for firms that were prepared to sign a 10-year contract providing for all their heavy goods to be transported on the railways instead of the roads. I should be happy to write to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, or to the Minister of Transport, describing some of the suggestions that have been made.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): The hon. Gentleman may be surprised to learn that, in my constituency, most people with low incomes do not use cars at all, but depend on public transport. The West Yorkshire passenger transport executive provides free transport for pensioners and disabled people who require it.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Lady's area must be very different from mine. In many small villages in my area there is only one bus a week, and anyone with an urgent appointment with the doctor or an urgent need to claim benefit would still be waiting.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Has my hon. Friend taken account of the fact that, as a result of the Budget, the cost of bus services will rise? The extra fuel increase must be borne not just by private motorists—who, of course, are of no concern to Labour Members—but by bus companies and other operators. They will have to raise their prices, which will drive the hon. Lady's constituents and others off the buses. Either they will be unable to travel at all or they will have to try to obtain lifts in private cars.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I agree. As my right hon. Friend said in his speech, if public service costs are to be increased without there being a commensurate increase in public sector grant, the cost will inevitably fall on the consumer.

One of my predilections is listening to Jimmy Young on the way from my constituency to London. Anyone who listened to his programme this morning will have heard people telephoning the programme saying they did not use public transport because of the cost. One lady who lived in Edgware, or some such London borough, tried to give up using her car for a month, but had to start using it again because the cost of public transport was even higher than that of the car. How daft can the Government get?

I do not want to be further provoked into making a long speech. I have made my points, and I hope that the Government will consider them carefully when drawing up next year's Budget.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I was struck by the extraordinary way in which the Government are trying to justify this increase in duty. They seem to be using two arguments, and they are in a frightful muddle.

The first argument was that it was a good idea to take the opportunity of the Budget to increase consumption taxes. Indeed, if consumption is rising at an unsustainable rate and the economy is in danger of overheating—the analysis made by the Government in their Red Book—it might be sensible to take advantage of a Budget to reduce consumption spending. The Government have demonstrated, however, that that argument is not available to them because the major tax rises that they introduced were, first, on companies and the corporate sector—the windfall tax—and, secondly, on savings, with the abolition of the dividend tax credit, which will have exactly the opposite effect in so far as it reduces the return on savings—and, thus, the inducement to save—and so increases consumption. People will save less and spend a greater proportion of their disposable income.

4.30 pm

A Government who tax savings cannot coherently argue in the same Budget and Finance Bill that the increase on tax on hydrocarbon fuels is a measure to reduce consumption. If there were not already sufficient inconsistency between that argument and the attack on savings through the abolition of the dividend tax credit, the Government are at the same time reducing value added tax on domestic fuel. So they are reducing a consumption tax on a hydrocarbon fuel with one hand, while increasing a consumption tax on such a fuel with the other. There is no rhyme or reason about this Government and this measure.

Mr. Geraint Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the reason for that inconsistency is wanting, on the one hand, to stop or limit the environmental damage caused by exhaust fumes and the use of cars and, on the other, to help poor, elderly people to keep warm and to stop them dying of hypothermia during the winter? There is no inconsistency from our point of view.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I have dealt with one inconsistency—that of claiming that it is necessary to reduce consumption through this increase in tax on hydrocarbon fuels while increasing consumption spending by a slightly greater reduction in another tax on another set of hydrocarbon fuels and, at the same time, attacking savings to a considerable degree, which will only reduce the savings ratio and increase consumption.

There is no rhyme or reason. No doubt that is why the hon. Gentleman did not produce that argument in his intervention. He obviously agrees with me that the Government cannot credibly use that argument because they are in a state of complete contradiction over it. So he used the other argument, which I was coming to—environmentalism.

It is said that it is environmentally friendly to increase carbon taxes because that reduces emissions into the atmosphere of carbon dioxide and, indeed, of other substances, some of which might be toxic. I am very much in favour of using taxes to reduce the ill effects of environmental pollution. That is a good principle. It was taken a long way, under the distinguished period in office of the previous Administration, by a distinguished Secretary of State for the Environment.

Nevertheless, there seems to be another major confusion in the Government's attitude. This tax is being increased and there are attempts to use the tax system to push people to use diesel fuel. As has been said, using the tax system to increase the relative inducement to consumers to go for unleaded fuel has brought about the perversity of super-unleaded petrol, which contains a high element of benzene, which is a nasty carcinogen. That is hardly an environmentally friendly consequence of using the tax system to try to bias consumers' choice of petrol. There are the references to diesel, but there is increasing evidence that the effects of diesel fuel use are environmentally harmful, in that fine particles of diesel fuel in the atmosphere are absorbed through the lungs into the system and never really discharged. Medical evidence therefore suggests that, from the environmental or public health viewpoint, it is not a terribly clever idea to increase diesel consumption.

For the Government to justify bringing forward taxes on environmental grounds, we need a reasoned, coherent and systematic account of how the Government believe public health is negatively impacted by the use of different hydrocarbon fuels and what set of tax measures is likely to produce the optimal use of such fuels. We have not had that; we have had only piecemeal measures, justified by a mixture of electoral demagogy and last-minute financial pressures. Those measures are then masked by high-sounding general principles relating to the environment or to the fiscal management of demand in the economy. Those arguments are completely bogus and those principles are not being coherently or honestly applied.

Mr. Bennett: Did the hon. Gentleman make that criticism of the previous Government?

Mr. Davies: I have indeed made my points about benzene in super-unleaded fuel and the environmental

[Mr. Davies]

impact of diesel fuel on a number of occasions, in the House and in Committee, under both the current Administration and the previous Administration. With the consent of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), I intend to go on making these points until I feel that the Administration are listening to them. I hope that they will be addressed. They deserve to be addressed and I hope that the Financial Secretary will address them when she replies to the debate, because they go to the heart of the rationale of the new clause.

I represent a rural constituency—Grantham and Stamford, which is a large part of south Lincolnshire—and I am intensely conscious of the disproportionate burden placed on rural populations by any increase in hydrocarbon duties. I have to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) that not only does it place a burden on people in the conduct of their private lives—going to school or to the doctor—but it places a burden on employment by increasing the costs of employment. One of the positive features of the modern world is greater mobility. Because they have cars, people can now take jobs not merely within walking or bicycling distance, as was the case some 50 years ago, but within a range of 10, 15 or 20 miles, depending on how good the road system is. That must be good for the economy, because it maximises the opportunity to use people's talents in the economy; and it is good for individuals, because they have a wider range of job opportunities. Anything that increases the costs of mobility reduces that mobility, as night follows day. One must be conscious of that.

Against all that, I accept entirely the environmental arguments. There is a double environmental argument relating to hydrocarbon fuels: they are non-renewable and it is sensible, over time, to try to economise in their use; and there are serious issues relating to atmospheric pollution and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Mr. Geraint Davies: It seems that the hon. Gentleman's argument is leading towards a suggestion that any state intervention through charging excise duty on fuel is a fundamental constraint on freedom. He seemed to be proposing that we should cut all tax on fuel to enable people to make the maximum use of motor vehicles across Britain, without any limit, in the name of freedom. He has made only a passing reference to the environment.

Where does the hon. Gentleman stand? Does he not agree that when the Government consider public opinion, a balance must be struck? I believe that the Government have struck the right balance in favour of public opinion.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I always enjoy the hon. Gentleman's interventions on my contributions, and I have listened to a number of them in Committee. Most of them are attempts to caricature my position, but that particular intervention does not caricature it; indeed, it does not relate to my remarks at all. Under no circumstances did I take any of the lines that the hon. Gentleman has attributed to me.

I have always argued that a balance must be struck. I am extremely conscious of the burden placed on my constituents by any hydrocarbon fuel duties. On the other hand, as I have now had to repeat several times during my speech, as a result of interventions, I recognise a strong environmental case for hydrocarbon duties, which take a disproportionately high share of total consumption taxes. If I did not believe that, they should not be subject to excise duties at all, but simply to VAT. We have singled out those fuels, together with alcoholic drinks and tobacco, for special forms of consumption tax. I accept that principle, which was also accepted by the previous Government.

If we are to strike the correct balance, it is important that the Government should set out the parameters of the equation. They should explain what they are specifically trying to achieve in terms of the environmental impact of the taxes and, therefore, what levels of tax are appropriate for particular types of hydrocarbon fuel. That argument has not been made.

The Government seem to govern us from watertight compartments. When Treasury Ministers defend the hydrocarbon duties they do not engage with the environmental arguments that are used to justify, spuriously, the fiscal measures introduced. That is not good enough.

If the public are to be asked to pay a disproportionate burden of taxation through hydrocarbon duties, they are entitled to be given a clear and coherent account from the Government of the exact environmental purpose of those taxes. They should inform the public how those hydrocarbon fuels have been selected for tax with regard to their particular environmental attributes, positive or negative.

Dawn Primarolo: The increase in hydrocarbon taxes signals the Government's commitment to the environment. It is intended to raise sufficient revenue and achieve sustainable economic growth while protecting the environment.

To answer the point raised specifically raised by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), that duty is designed to ensure that road users cover the economic costs that they impose as well as help to reduce harmful emissions. In particular, the duty will help to achieve the target that the Government have set themselves to try to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. by 2010. The measure will contribute 2.5 million tonnes towards that target.

To pick up on the points raised by the hon. Members for Grantham and Stamford and for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), which relate to new clause 4, this Government, in common with the previous Government, must continue to make assessments of the fuels used and their polluting nature. We must judge the impact of those fuels on health and the environment. The Government must consider the mechanisms available to them to encourage greater fuel efficiency and, therefore, less pollution.

Sir Michael Spicer: I am glad to hear what the Minister has said in answer to the points raised by me and my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) about a thorough, comprehensive review. If that is what is proposed, what would be the deadline for such a report and when would it be published? In the absence of such studies, how can the hon. Lady say that the new tax has a specific relationship either to economic costs, towards which, as she knows, the motorist pays far more than he gets back, or environmental costs?

4.45 pm

Dawn Primarolo: The previous Government's use of hydrocarbon taxes showed that they led to an increase in efficiency and a reduction in pollution and carbon dioxide emissions. For instance, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is well aware of the debate surrounding leaded and unleaded fuel and the successful strategy of using the tax system to encourage the growth in unleaded fuel consumption.

This is the second year in which the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) has tabled such a new clause. It represents special pleading on behalf of a single product, ecodiesel. As he has already said, he is using the clause as a means of discovering the extent of the Government's intentions. Although we appreciate the environmental argument for blended diesel fuels, we took full account of the available products when setting the rate for the ultra-low-sulphur diesel. The problem is that if new clause 4 were accepted, it would create a need for a product that would have to be imported. The balance we have struck on the ultra-low-sulphur diesel has the advantage that the current definition of such a fuel means that the United Kingdom industry could immediately produce such oil if it chose to do so.

The hon. Gentleman has also asked about the Government's intentions. I am afraid that there are no definitive studies that can tell us about the exact polluting properties of all the fuels. Our knowledge of them continues to develop in line with scientific knowledge. We will, however, continue to review the case for tax incentives for environmentally friendly fuels, in line with our statement of environmental intent which was announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor at the Budget. Such assessment will continue and, each year, the Government will make a judgment on how best to use the carrot-and-stick approach, as described by the hon. Member for Cotswold, to enhance and develop fuel efficiency and to protect the environment.

The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford was a little confused in his arguments about the environment. Information gained from the experience of the previous Government reveals that the use of tax incentives has helped to develop fuel efficiency and reduce pollution. They will also help this Government to achieve their target.

I shall now respond to what the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney) said about the impact of the measure on rural motorists. The requirement for the total cost of motoring to be borne by the motorist will apply in urban and rural areas, but he specifically identified the problems that people living in rural areas have with increased costs—in particular, the price of petrol is higher.

The Government are very sensitive to the needs of the rural areas and we are aware of car dependency, but it is not the place of the duty system necessarily to take that into account. The hon. Member for North Tayside knows that the Government are committed to reducing car dependency and encouraging greater use of public transport, and that the Deputy Prime Minister has announced his intention to publish a White Paper in the spring that will seek to address those problems. The White Paper will pick up on the points that the hon. Member for Cotswold made about seeking new partnerships with local authorities and the development of community transport schemes. I am sure that the Deputy Prime Minister will be delighted to receive representations from the hon. Member for Cotswold, who made a very positive contribution, supporting the Government's strategy to achieve their environmental objectives.

Amendment No. 33 proposes that a lower duty be levied in rural areas than in urban ones. The hon. Member for North Tayside probably knows that, because of the way in which duty rates are charged on oil producers, such a system would be impossible to administer fairly. Once the fuel had left the oil producer, how would we determine whether it was destined for rural or urban use or whether people who purchased it rurally would use it entirely rurally?

The Office of Fair Trading, responding to the Trade and Industry Select Committee investigation of 1996, has now launched an inquiry into petrol retailing, including the effects of possible predatory pricing. It will also study the impact on rural areas, because if there is a problem there, it will be a much wider problem than the rate of duty. I hope that the hon. Member for North Tayside will want to follow that investigation very carefully.

I remind the hon. Member for North Tayside that there are many influences on rural businesses other than road fuel duty. The preliminary results of a Scottish Office study suggest that transport costs, in relation to the value of output, are no greater in the highlands than in central Scotland or other parts of the United Kingdom. The issue is therefore the pricing of companies in rural, as opposed to urban, areas.

It is important that people seek out more efficient ways of using their car and more fuel-efficient technologies for their cars, but that problem will not be solved overnight. The Government very much have in mind the express desire of the electorate that the Government should take positive steps to protect the environment; in doing so with these duties, there are extra costs to be borne.

Mr. Swinney: I am sure that many people in the rural community that I represent would reiterate that they share the concern that we all feel about the environment, but I believe that rural communities are also waiting for signs that the Government understand that their circumstances are very different from those in urban areas. Some of the—undoubtedly effective—initiatives to improve public transport in other areas are meaningless to communities where buses come once a week.

Dawn Primarolo: I confirm to the hon. Gentleman that the Government are very concerned about the experience of people living in rural communities, the absence of public transport and the problem of access to shopping. Those are far wider issues and need to be viewed in the round. The Government are committed to doing that in their study on public transport and, for example, in following closely the outcomes of the study being undertaken by the OFT. However, there must be a balance: motorists must bear more of the costs that they create on the environment. The targets for the reductions in carbon dioxide emissions and pollutants in the atmosphere are crucial to that.

In amendment No. 26—a rather confused amendment—the Conservatives cannot make up their mind whether they are in favour of measures for the environment. They seem to want to oppose the measure simply because the

[Dawn Primarolo]

Government suggested it. As I said, it reflects the Government's decision to place the environment at the core of our objectives for the taxation system, by discouraging environmental pollution by road users. It will contribute significantly towards the carbon dioxide savings necessary to meet the Government's targets. Those targets will be discussed at Kyoto in December, when the Government are prepared to envisage substantial cuts in carbon dioxide emissions.

The convention for duty increases coming into force has always been 6 pm on the day of the announcement. The aim is to limit the disorder in the marketplace, and traders are used to dealing with it in that way. These proposals balance the Government's need to reach our environmental objectives with the need to create revenue for the Government as part of the balanced approach to the Budget, ensuring that we have a deficit reduction plan—something which Opposition Members sorely neglected to formulate when they had the opportunity to do so. I ask the House to reject the amendments.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) may reply on new clause 4. However, given that we are also discussing amendment No. 26, which is in my name, I shall respond briefly—although it is difficult to respond to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury because she did not answer any of the points made by Conservative Members. I have seldom heard such an inadequate and evasive response. She read out parts of her brief, all right, but she did not answer the points that we raised in debate.

Mr. Bennett: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is highly unfair to criticise my hon. Friend for not replying to some of the points of the debate, as the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who made some substantial points, did not even stop to listen to the reply.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: All that the Financial Secretary did in response to the matters that we raised was to say that our amendment was confused. It is not at all confused; it is quite simple.

We are saying that the Chancellor promised an emergency Budget to implement a windfall tax, and we expected precisely that. Instead, he introduced a 100-page Finance Bill, including this huge and unexpected hit for all who transport goods, drive cars or vehicles of any type or use heating oils.

Our message could hardly be clearer. We believe that the date of any increase should be returned to what it was in the original Budget statement in November 1996, which we understood that the Government had taken over. They took over all our expenditure targets. We assumed that, in the absence of anything to the contrary in the Labour manifesto, Labour would take over the projected revenue increases as well, with the single exception of the windfall tax. We were wrong about that and so were the British people.

What the hon. Lady has not dealt with is the fact that this big increase in duty has a large and damaging effect on the individuals whom we represent—we went into that in some detail—and on industrial costs, with which the House should certainly deal. The Government say that they are interested in competitiveness, but they do nothing about it. It also has a damaging effect on the retail prices index, which has gone up as a direct result and which affects the economy generally, and on public services. The hon. Lady did not even attempt to defend the Government, who have reduced real expenditure on public services by £3 billion this year. That figure comes from independent sources and it is interesting that the hon. Lady did not attempt to contradict it.

We can therefore take it that it is an established fact that public expenditure in real terms will fall by £3 billion in the remainder of the current financial year and by £5.25 billion in the next financial year. I do not want to worry Labour Members. They may not have thought that they had come into the House to increase public expenditure, but I am sure that they did not expect to have to defend a real reduction in public expenditure. That is what we have established, and the Minister is entirely silent on it.

In the light of the wholly inadequate response to the points raised, I signal that we shall press the amendment to a vote when we reach that part of our proceedings.

5 pm

Sir Michael Spicer: The Minister raised two arguments against new clause 4, one of which is certainly inaccurate and the other probably is. First, she argued that the product would be imported. This country has plenty of rapeseed and a large blending industry, so how does she know that the product would have to be imported? It was a strange argument for her to put forward. Secondly, she argued that it was product-specific. The new clause makes it clear that it is impact-specific, not product-specific. It simply asks for exemptions for products whose emissions can cause cancer, so I do not understand why the hon. Lady had to draw on that argument.

The Minister said nothing specific about the review. She talked in general terms about the cross-impact of all forms of emissions and their cost on the environment. As she has now promised the House that there will be a report, will she be more specific about when the report will be issued and what its general scope will be? At least we shall have elicited that from her.

Now that the Bill has raised petrol duties to such an extent, I should have thought that the Financial Secretary could at least hold down to the present level the duties on the products mentioned in the new clause. That would please some Labour Back Benchers because it would have the effect on the environment to which I alluded, and which she accepts, but would also have a desirable effect on the renewable industry, which would have an extra market.

The Government take little notice of what their Back Benchers think. I appreciate that in return they get little response from them. Labour Back Benchers sit mute for most of the time, except when they are making maiden speeches, and they find even that difficult to do. I accept that the Minister can ride roughshod over her Back Benchers, but I should have thought that this measure, at least, would please them.

Given the Minister's view, I will let the Opposition vote down the measure, to show at least that the Government's actions are different from the rhetoric that they espouse outside the House.

Question put and negatived.

Clause 7

RATE OF DUTY ON SPIRITS

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I beg to move amendment No. 32, in page 5, leave out lines 27 to 29.

New Members may not be aware of my long-standing interest in the whisky industry, but I represent the part of the United Kingdom with the largest number of distilleries per square mile. I therefore follow with great interest the significance of any change in taxation and duty as it affects employment in my area. The industry is vital not only in Moray but throughout Scotland and the United Kingdom.

May I insert an element of humour into the debate? On Saturday I visited Dufftown highland games. Dufftown is known as a town founded on seven stills. A story that is reputed to have emerged from the games over the years is that the annual raffle for a gallon of Grant's Scotch whisky became a matter of great concern when the bottle disappeared at one stage and was never recovered. Bodyguards now guard the raffle stall whenever the games are held. I bought a raffle ticket, but so far I do not seem to have been lucky because I have had no information about it.

On a more serious note, we should consider the employment aspects of the industry. Some 71,300 people in the United Kingdom depend on the Scotch whisky industry, according to a prestigious report produced by the Fraser of Allander Institute. That is three times the number of jobs dependent on computer manufacturing and four times the number dependent on the pharmaceutical industry. In Scotland, 14,000 direct Scotch whisky jobs support 47,460 jobs in our nation. Anyone reading those figures will realise that I am discussing a serious aspect of the economy as a whole, and the opportunities for employment that it offers.

The amendment seeks to stop the increase of duty on spirits as from 1 January 1998. During the Budget speech on 2 July, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

> "I have . . . decided to review all alcohol and tobacco duties. While that review is under way, inflation-only rises for alcohol will take effect".—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1997; Vol. 297, c. 311.]

So many reviews are now taking place that we must address the immediate impact of some of the decisions that have been taken. As someone who has lived her life in politics as a democrat, I always welcome reviews, but, as people are saying in Scotland recently, the Government now have more reviews than there usually are at the Edinburgh festival fringe. According to my latest count, there are just short of 40 reviews and no date has been set for their finalisation.

Having raised duty, albeit on an inflation-only basis, the House has not sent a good message to this vital industry. VAT and duty on Scotch whisky amount to two thirds of the retail price of a bottle of Scotch. When taxes rose in 1992 and 1994, the home market and tax revenues fell; when taxes were held steady in 1993, and cut in 1995 and 1996, revenues improved. The Scotch whisky industry does not need such an increase at this time.

I have long argued in the House that there should be a level playing field in terms of taxation on spirits. It is only fair at this stage to mention William McKelvey, convener of the all-party Scotch whisky group, who retired through ill health at the last election. He and I, and various other hon. Members, regularly met the Paymaster General and others to argue this case strongly. The single European market has done nothing to help the Scotch whisky industry, which is discriminated against in the context of duty on wines and beers, yet the industry earns more than £2.2 billion a year to offset the balance of trade problems faced by successive Governments.

The amendment would send out a clear message to the Scotch whisky industry that the Government have taken on board the importance of the industry. The increase should not be brought in on 1 January 1998, but should be postponed until a review has taken place.

When the Financial Secretary responds to the debate, will she advise me what steps have already been taken to implement the review, and with whom the Government are consulting—whether with the Scotch Whisky Association, the various organisations involved in the whisky industry, or the all-party group, which has been re-established and is one of the most effective groups in the House? Can she give me some details? When will the review be forthcoming? The whisky industry wants to know whether new Labour has a new message for an old and traditional industry.

Mr. Phil Sawford (Kettering): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech in the closing stages of this important debate on the Finance Bill. Maiden speeches must come somewhere, and a debate on alcoholic liquor duties seemed as good a place as any.

It is a great privilege for me to be in the House representing the Kettering constituency. I was born in the constituency and have lived there all my life. It is where my home is and where my heart is. It is where I have raised my family and taken an interest in community affairs for the past 20 years. I very much appreciate the support that I have been given by local electors, and I recognise my responsibility to the people of the constituency.

The Kettering constituency covers an area of more than 400 sq miles set in the heart of rural Northamptonshire and includes the whole of the borough of Kettering and a large part of the Daventry district. Kettering is the main urban centre, but the constituency also includes the smaller A6 towns of Rothwell, Burton Latimer and my home town of Desborough, in addition to some 50 villages and hamlets.

The area has excellent road and rail links. The A14 or M1-A1 link road puts Kettering firmly at the crossroads of England. Combined with the midland main line rail service, that provides many benefits and opportunities for commercial expansion.

The constituency has a bustling commercial centre noted for its success and diversity. It also has many historic and picturesque villages which preserve the charm and tranquillity of a traditional rural community. The need to balance new development with conservation has been an important feature of local planning issues for many years.

There are many tourist attractions in the Kettering area—Boughton house, Rockingham castle and Wicksteed park, to name but a few. We also have the Triangular lodge, where it is said that the gunpowder plot was conceived and planned—not everyone from the Kettering area came to the House with honourable intentions.

[Mr. Phil Sawford]

That cannot be said of my predecessor, Mr. Roger Freeman, who represented the constituency for 14 years. Through that period, he rose to the dizzy height of Cabinet Minister. While my talents and natural abilities have yet to be fully recognised, my immediate goal is to represent the constituency with the dedication and commitment shown by my predecessor.

Roger Freeman was a very hard-working Member of Parliament. In my dealings with Roger over the years, he was always extremely polite, courteous and helpful. Despite our political differences, I found him a good and decent man to work with. I know that some of my hon. Friends have had a little difficulty in paying tribute to their predecessors, but I have no such difficulty with Roger Freeman.

Having given the customary thumb-nail sketch of my constituency and paid tribute to my predecessor, I shall move on to the business in hand and paint a different picture of the concerns and issues in Kettering. Beyond the picture postcards and thatched cottages, there is another picture. In this light, I welcome the Budget proposals.

In my constituency, there is great concern about the future of the national health service. Indeed, only last week it was announced that the area health authority is facing a deficit this year of several millions of pounds. This has serious implications for local services throughout the coming winter and over the coming year.

The local further education college is also running a deficit budget. I have already had meetings with management and staff representatives to discuss their financial difficulties. Redundancies are being discussed.

5.15 pm

I have visited many local schools and have seen at first hand the appalling state of disrepair caused by the lack of investment in school buildings. That is having a detrimental effect on staff and pupils. In Rothwell, a small town with a population of 7,000, mobile classrooms are a feature of all the schools. It is possible for children in that town to spend their entire school life being taught in what are basically wooden huts.

In some of the central wards of Kettering, youth unemployment is more than 25 per cent. It is perhaps no coincidence that those areas also have the highest crime rates, and that the crime rates have doubled over the past few years.

I am proud of the area that I represent and privileged to be a Member of Parliament, but I cannot ignore the problems in the community. I welcome my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget proposals, which reflect the people's priorities. The additional £1.3 billion for schools' capital spending over the next five years from the windfall tax and the £1 billion for current spending will provide some of the resources that our schools need to raise standards.

The extra £1.2 billion for the NHS will begin to improve patient care and restore public confidence in our health service. I welcome the additional funding for breast cancer announced a few days ago by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

The welfare-to-work provisions announced in the Budget offer new hope and opportunities for young people, lone parents and the long-term unemployed in my constituency.

I welcome my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's commitment to a fairer tax system, with the reduction of VAT on fuel to 5 per cent., which will benefit more than 17,000 pensioners in the Kettering constituency. The Government must ensure that the resources are available to meet all those needs.

With reference to the amendment, I understand why the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) should table such a proposal, but the amendment offers no suggestion about where the necessary resources might be raised.

Of course the Budget is a tough one. None of us expected to come to the House and make easy decisions. All Budgets must have a tough edge. It could be argued that the Chancellor picked up the poisoned chalice from the previous Government. We need a balanced Budget. The Chancellor will look for extra resources to put into health and education. The amendment would have been improved if it contained suggestions about how any shortfall could be made up if it were accepted.

In the Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out a clear statement on economic stability. For the first time in 18 years, we have a Budget for all the people. It honours our pledges and reflects the desire for change that was so clearly demonstrated by the people of Britain on 1 May. I welcome this opportunity in my maiden speech to congratulate my right hon. Friend and his Front-Bench Treasury team on the Budget, and I look forward to the days when I do not have to visit crumbling schools, when the people whom I represent have their faith in the NHS restored, and when we can get to grips with youth unemployment and crime in our communities, and make Britain a better place.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): It is my pleasure, in following the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Sawford), to congratulate him on his maiden speech and to wish him well in his career in the House. The House will have noted the generous spirit in which he paid tribute to his predecessor. I know his constituency reasonably well, having made one or two campaign forays there, but I can reassure him that I do not expect to make any more in the immediate future.

Speaking as a Scot, the only thing that disappointed me, as the hon. Gentleman would expect, about his speech was his unwillingness to support the admirable amendment moved by the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). In the spirit of Scottish politics at the moment, I am happy to say yes, yes to her amendment. In wishing the hon. Member for Kettering well, I assume that, with his maiden speech now on the parliamentary record, he is not proposing to have a career in the Scottish Parliament, as and when it comes about. He may find that the voters there are less generous in their response to his comments than I am.

On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I am happy to give our support to the amendment. The points made by the hon. Member for Moray about the importance of the whisky industry at local and especially rural level, as well as about the huge contribution it makes to the national Exchequer were telling. For many years, all of us involved in the all-party group have made those points in discussions with successive Treasury Ministers.

Over recent years, we have been encouraged to find some resonance from the Treasury in terms of recognising, as the hon. Member for Moray pointed out, not only the local importance of the industry in areas such as ours, but the massive contribution it makes to the public purse for the United Kingdom as a whole. It has been encouraging to see that point being taken on board which is why it was dispiriting, if I can use that term, that an uprating was announced in the Budget. We feel that it is out of kilter at this stage.

First, the local importance of the industry is well understood throughout Scotland. Secondly, we had been making progress on the duty on whisky and the change is a setback. The change is all the more ironic because the Chancellor of the Exchequer is a Scot who represents a Scottish constituency. Thirdly, the change will bring us back to the problem that has bedevilled the whisky industry for too many years. There has been an unfair playing field in terms of the difference in the tax take from whisky and from other alcoholic drinks. We have been trying to make progress in the direction of fairness, but the changes takes us some way back from that.

In due course, we shall see whether the argument about the elasticity of demand holds sway. It may be that, some way down the track, the ultimate tax take will decrease as a result of the increase in duty because consumer habits will be moved in other directions. The Chancellor may find that the increase proves to be counter-productive because it does not result in the income that he anticipates and because it is a further disincentive for the interests of the Scotch whisky industry as a whole.

I am happy to support the amendment, which will find a warm and wide echo in Scotland. I hope that it will commend itself to the House.

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): In making my maiden speech, I am most grateful for the advice that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, gave me earlier today. I represent Finchley and Golders Green. It is a tremendous honour to represent Finchley; I usually wait a little while before saying "Golders Green". That is not quite the way in which I want to put it; I will come to my predecessors in a moment.

I have listened to quite a number of maiden speeches, including the one made by my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Sawford). When considering all the good maiden speeches, I tried to make a distinction between those hon. Members who spoke without notes and those who spoke with notes. My view was that if they were of equal value, I would go for those speeches made without notes. I intended to be in the emulation business, but when I considered the matter in the days prior to my speech, I felt that my emulation would compete strongly with my human frailty—in this case, specifically, my forgetfulness. I thought, "Who will win between emulation and frailty?" I wrote my speech, but I have forgotten my glasses so whatever I have written down, I cannot read. I have in front of me a number of sheets covered with very large letters to remind me of some of the highlights. I can tell hon. Members that they have now missed the best speech in the House for a considerable time. They will, unfortunately, now not hear it; they will hear only a short summary. I am very sorry about that.

I have a few comments to make about my predecessors. My constituency is Finchley and Golders Green, and I do not make a joke about Golders Green. Finchley is proud to have the Hampstead Garden Suburb, Golders Green and Childs Hill wards embroidered on to it. We always had to work hard, especially when Mrs. Thatcher was Prime Minister, to come a decent second. The problem with standing in the Prime Minister's constituency is that 10 or 20 other parties also field candidates. As it costs only £500 to stand as a candidate, those parties pay a low price for television coverage. We always worked hard to come a good second to Mrs. Thatcher whom we never thought we could unseat—and so it turned out. Her own party did it for us.

My immediate predecessors were Mr. Hartley Booth, who represented Finchley, and Mr. Marshall, who represented Hendon, South. These two guys fought it out against one another and because one bussed in rather more supporters than the other, it was Mr. Marshall who won the selection. I distinctly remember reading in all the local newspapers that he would be the next Member of Parliament for Finchley and Golders Green. We had a good fight.

Both those gentlemen are honourable gentlemen and I have always been treated extraordinarily nicely by both of them. Mr. Marshall was a hands-on man in many ways; he knew an enormous number of his constituents. I do not think I can equal him in that respect, especially in terms of my Jewish constituents; I honour him for his relationship with the Jewish community. I will do my best to emulate that part of my predecessor although there are other parts of him that I would not wish to emulate.

Mr. Hartley Booth was a slightly different kind of man; he was a grand design man. He did not know all that many of his constituents, but he was a very thoughtful man and I honour him as my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering honoured his predecessor. Both are very honourable men, but there is one difference between my two predecessors. They both had considerable outside interests, but they did not entirely overlap.

It is more difficult to refer to Mrs. Thatcher. I have been in local government for many years. Every time Mrs. Thatcher came to the constituency, she would invite me to see her. She was unfailingly charming and could always remember far more than I could remember, even if I had prepared myself. She would always say hello and remember people's names. I have enormous respect for her, but, fortunately for her perhaps, I must say that there my Thatcherism stops. I have never had any desire to emulate any of her policies. I believe that she will go down in history as a remarkable woman, most of her remarkableness being bringing this nation to its knees. I must, however, remember with warmth her invitations to me. There is a difficulty, as I have explained, and I am definitely not a Thatcherite in a political sense.

The House will know that my constituency is in the London borough of Barnet. I shall not say much about its infrastructure because I am not much into that. It is seen as a wealthy borough, and as a result we have never had the benefit of an SRB—a single regeneration budget grant. Yet Barnet is among the 10 poorest boroughs in dealing with housing the homeless. In future, we may get an SRB.

The difficulty for an area such as Barnet and for the constituency that I represent is that there is enormous wealth enjoyed by those living only a few hundreds yards away from grave poverty in tower blocks.

5.30 pm

During the middle 1980s, I was a member of the local planning committee. The committee was engaged in considering planning permission for a home in the Bishop's avenue, and the price of the property became £12 million. It was not more than 300 or 400 yd away from tower blocks where 60 per cent. of the residents were unemployed and living in considerable poverty. That is an example of the difficulty that we face in Barnet.

Overall average incomes in Barnet are quite good—they are above average, in fact—but poverty is high. It is appalling in some instances, as it is in many other areas of the country.

The remarkable feature of my constituency is not its infrastructure but the wealth of the people. The most beneficial feature of representing a constituency such as Finchley and Golders Green is its demanding nature. There are important one-issue groups. There are so many people in my constituency and in others, both black and white, who make their areas rich by their individual contributions, and I hope to represent my constituents as best I can.

There are identifiable groups, sometimes with one issue, to which I am especially warmly disposed, including those in my constituency who come from Cyprus, both from the Greek sector and the Turkish. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will be pressing forward with a resolution of the Cyprus problem so that Cyprus might become one of the friendly nations in the European Union while at the same time impressing Turkey to stand off and to give Cyprus a fair chance as an independent nation.

I am impressed by the briefings that I have had from several colleagues. I thank especially my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), who has been helpful to me in further explaining the case for Cyprus.

There are many people of the Jewish faith in my constituency. Indeed, there is a Jewish community, and I have been interested in it for many years. I know how dangerous it would be on some occasions to say anything more about what is not necessarily a homogeneous community. That being so, one must be extremely careful in making any statements about it. Many members of the community, however, are worried about the middle east. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will try to make Europe more interested in attempting to establish peace in the middle east, and that is only to be welcomed.

In the western part of my constituency, Cricklewood, there are many people from Ireland, especially Northern Ireland. I am aware of their thoughts and concerns. I am in awe of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland because of the work that she is doing to obtain peace.

Also in my constituency are many people who come from the Indian sub-continent, and we are pleased that they are with us.

I have read the amendments carefully, and some of them, including the one that is before us, are of merit. I have no doubt that they will be considered by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his Treasury team. The House often considers amendments that relate to only a few people and deal with causes that the Chancellor of the day has not addressed. Most of the amendments that are before us today congratulate in their own way the Finance Bill as a whole. On that basis, I offer my warm congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is my pleasure to congratulate both hon. Members who made their maiden speeches in the debate. We were initially slightly puzzled as to why they chose to break their silence in a debate on spirits, but any misgivings were soon put to rest by the quality and sobriety of their speeches.

The hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Sawford) spoke with great feeling about his constituency. He is right to observe that, despite the prosperity and peace of our constituencies, there are pockets of deprivation. The hon. Gentleman is evidently determined to use his first few years at least to tackle that. We wish him well in that endeavour. We appreciated his genuine and sincere tribute to Roger Freeman, whom we on the Opposition Benches greatly miss.

We were delighted, too, by the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis). I suggest that he continues to mislay his glasses when he speaks. His contribution contained a nice balance between substance and spontaneity. We hope to hear a great deal more from both hon. Members during finance debates as well as others.

Conservative Members will be supporting the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) in the sense that we argued vigorously in Committee for a reduction in the duty on spirits. To that extent, it may be that the hon. Lady's amendment lacks ambition. I believe that she wishes only to remove the increase in duty from 1 January 1998 while we argued strongly for an overall reduction. It was one of the few issues that were given a full hearing in Committee, unhampered by the timetable motion.

We were prevented by the Chairman, however—I believe that it was Mr. McWilliam at the time—from sampling the product. He issued a stern injunction that only water or medicines could be consumed during Committee sittings. Even our attempt to have whisky classified for medicinal use was ruled out of order. Our appetite for the drink was partly removed, however, by the information that we received from the Economic Secretary, who told us that north of the border whisky is frequently mixed with Irn Bru—a terrible punishment for whisky, as Irn Bru is nasty enough even on its own.

We had time to examine the issue in the round. We asked—this echoes the hon. Member for Moray—that if we are to have a review of spirit duties, including their effect on consumption and shopping patterns, why announce now that there will be an increase in duty taking effect form the start of next year? The proposal surely pre-empts or prejudges the outcome of the review. Just as the Red Queen in "Alice in Wonderland" called for the verdict first and then the evidence, the Government are apparently announcing what is to happen and then consulting about what ought to happen.

We agree that there are serious issues to do with cross-border shopping and the smuggling of alcoholic drinks—the Conservative Government grappled with those issues when in office—so perhaps it would be wise to look into the problem again. However, it is unwise to signal in advance that rates of duty are to rise. With a strong pound, the temptation to smuggle alcoholic drinks in from the continent is already increasing. Indeed, that constitutes another case for continuing our reductions in duties on spirits—to counter the threat of illegal smuggling, not to mention the legitimate cross-border shopping that goes on. The latter may not always matter to spirits manufacturers, as it is the same whisky which tends to be brought back from Calais, but legitimate shopping abroad damages our off-licence trade and other drinks retailers.

We wanted the Government to continue the trend begun by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who in the previous two Budgets reduced spirits duties by 4 per cent.—adding up, over two years, to a 13 per cent. real cut in spirits duties. Among all spirits, of course, whisky is the most prominent one to be manufactured and sold here.

What is more, we wanted to help the industry. I believe that I heard the hon. Member for Moray say that the export industry is worth £2.2 billion per year—a large sum, and a great tribute to the Scottish companies concerned as we know that they meet discrimination in many overseas markets, where the duty on home-produced spirits is way below that on imported whiskies. When the British Government take that point up with the Governments concerned, they are often told that it is true, but that the United Kingdom itself imposes much higher duty on alcohol in the form of spirits than on other forms of alcohol.It therefore behoves us to move slowly towards putting our own house in order. That, in turn, reinforces the case for a slow, but steady reduction in spirit duties combined with a freeze on other alcohol duties.

We have urged the Government to continue the trend that the Conservative Government began. For the reasons that I have outlined, we have a lot of sympathy with the amendment and we believe that so far the Government have not explained their position.

Dawn Primarolo: I welcome the maiden speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Sawford), and his kind words for his predecessors. He graphically described the Labour Government's inheritance from the Conservatives: youth unemployment, underinvestment in the national health service and in education, and the growing problems of crime. He addressed the House with confidence and we look forward to hearing him speak again—with or without glasses, if indeed he wears them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis) made an amusing speech in which he, too, mentioned his predecessors. If he is capable of that good a speech without his glasses, we look forward to hearing one from him when he has them on.

The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) asked again some of the questions that he asked at length in Committee. It is certainly time we put our own house in order with regard to the problems of smuggling, cross-border shopping, criminal activity and the evasion of excise duties. The reason why we need to grapple with those problems now, of course, is that the Conservatives failed to do so over 18 years: their lectures about the problems facing the alcohol industry therefore sound rather hollow.

5.45 pm

As for the two cuts in spirits duties made by the previous Administration, I remind Conservative Members that when they lost the vote on VAT on fuel while trying to increase it from 8 to 17.5 per cent., they too increased the duty on spirits. By way of justification, they said that that was done to defend revenue: the money had to come from somewhere. Similarly, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has introduced an inflation-only rise to protect the revenue.

The hon. Members for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) asked about the review. The hon. Member for Moray discussed the importance of the scotch whisky industry to Scotland and the whole of the UK, and we agree that the previous Government's two duty cuts were not fully passed on in the prices to consumers, or in clearances of the product. If the industry is truly serious about dealing with the problems that it faces, it can meet the Government more often via the partnership that we are offering with respect to the review of alcohol duties.

The hon. Member for Moray asked when the review would be completed. The press release makes it clear that the date is 31 December 1997. It is hoped that the review will inform future Government decision making. It will cover direct and indirect effects, health, law and order, competition law, commercial fraud, smuggling and cross-border shopping. It will also assess the impact of a wide range of factors on those issues, including the single market, pricing structures, tax rates, transport costs, marketing, changing consumer tastes and competition law.

These terms of reference have been sent to the trade associations, including the Scottish Whisky Association and other representative bodies wishing to make representations to the Government. We have invited them to meet us urgently so as to push the review forward as quickly as possible.

The only way to tackle the problems that the hon. Lady described, and to bring about the security that she rightly sought for the Scottish whisky industry, is Government involvement in a partnership from which a balanced strategy emerges. There needs to be a balance between the interests of alcoholic drinks producers and of the Government as the collector of taxes: we need to defend the revenue.

I maintain that an inflation-only increase is reasonable. Now that the industry is being offered the chance to achieve, with the Government, a long-term strategy that deals once and for all with the difficulties that we faced every year under the Conservative Government and which we continue to face. The strategy must balance revenues and duties against the costs of drinks to the consumer; it must also take into account both the protection of jobs and the maintenance of law and order. I hope that the hon. Lady will agree that the Government have laid out a sensible way forward.

Mrs. Ewing: I join those hon. Members who have congratulated the hon. Members for Kettering (Mr. Sawford) and for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis) on their maiden speeches. I am very glad that they chose a debate on such an interesting subject to make their exciting and interesting speeches. Both spoke with great panache and style, and I look forward to hearing

[Mrs. Ewing]

future contributions from them. When the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green said that he had forgotten his glasses, I thought that he might have found the missing gallon bottle of Grant's whisky to which I referred. He was probably looking for another type of glass, but I nevertheless congratulate him.

The hon. Member for Kettering said that every Chancellor had to take tough decisions in a Budget, and that is true, but in this context it is important to remember that increases in duty reduce income to the Treasury. The Scotch Whisky Association said:

> "Prior to the 1995 tax cuts, spirits sales at home were falling and tax revenues diving—to the tune of a £123 million shortfall. In 1996, following the tax cut, the market revived and stabilised, and home sales began to climb. Even with annual cuts of 4 per cent., it would still take 14 years for the Scotch whisky industry to reach parity with other alcoholic drinks."

What may sound like a plea by the Scotch whisky industry for a reduction in price is in fact an attempt to increase the competitiveness of a very important export which is also a very important home product.

The Scotch whisky industry has 200 export markets, as the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) mentioned, and 140 of those markets exercise tax discrimination against the Scotch whisky industry. If we constantly raise domestic tax and duties on Scotch whisky, what message does it send to the people whom we have been trying for years to persuade to grant us a level playing field?

The Financial Secretary said that the tax hike and the subsequent reduction were due to the defeat of the previous Administration in relation to VAT on fuel. Prior to the then Opposition moving, as they have now in government, to reduce VAT on domestic fuel to 5 per cent., my party introduced a similar amendment. The hon. Lady said that our amendment was a cynical ploy because its aim could not achieved. It is not very fair to continue with that line of argument since we have a strong record of arguing for a cut in VAT on domestic fuel. We thought that it was petty spitefulness by the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), to hike duty on Scotch whisky as a result of our actions.

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Lady will remember that the House had just agreed to a reduction in VAT to 8 per cent. Had her party pushed for 5 per cent., we would have lost everything and ended up with 17.5 per cent. across the board. When the then shadow Chief Secretary said that he thought that the hon. Lady's party's amendment was cynical, he was referring to the fact that her party had put at risk the 8 per cent. by its parliamentary posturing.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Lady should think a bit more seriously about parliamentary posturing. We had done our homework—if only her own party and members of the then governing party had taken a different stance, we could still have managed to achieve our aim at that time. It is very sad that such an attitude is always displayed by Front Benchers. I intend to press the amendment to a Division.

If the review to which the Financial Secretary has referred is to be completed by 31 December 1997, why on earth do the Government intend to increase the duty automatically on 1 January 1998? If it is a genuine review, surely the increase in duty should be postponed and the issue analysed more thoroughly. I do not find the hon. Lady's answers acceptable; nor do I have any indication of the dates of meetings that she mentioned with the Scotch—not Scottish—Whisky Association.

I draw the Financial Secretary's attention to a document which must have been available to her. It is from the Scotch Whisky Association and is called "New Partnership, New Labour, New Opportunity: a Report for the New Government 1997". It concludes by urging the Government

> "to adopt the strategic objective of equal duty per degree of alcohol content for all alcoholic drinks"

and

> " to reduce the duty on spirits at the first opportunity."

As the response that we have received does not imply that that will happen, I shall press the amendment to a Division.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 158, Noes 327.

Division No. 67] **[5.55 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard *(Shefld Hallam)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing* [illegible]
Brady, Graham
Brake, Thomas
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclennan, Robert

McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thompson, William
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Professor Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Oliver Heald and
Mr. John Swinney.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Mrs Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*

Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie *(Scarborough)*
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris (Islington S)
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Jane Kennedy.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 26, in page 7, line 28, leave out '2nd July' and insert '25th November'.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 132, Noes 335.

Division No. 68] **[6.9 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, William
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Oliver Heald and
Mr. Malcolm Moss.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob

Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Mrs Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie *(Scarborough)*
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi

Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Jane Kennedy and
Ms Bridget Prentice.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 15

MORTGAGE INTEREST PAYMENTS

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I beg to move amendment No. 27, in page 10, line 12, leave out '1998–99' and insert '2003–04'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 28, in page 10, line 14, leave out '1998–99' and insert '2003–04'.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The clause will reduce mortgage interest relief from April next year. It is a tax-raising measure. There are other specious excuses attached to it, but, in essence, it is a way of raising another £900 million in the next financial year—1998-99—rising to £950 million in the following year. The 10.7 million people who have borrowed money to buy their homes will be affected directly and adversely.

There was nothing about that in the Labour manifesto. We knew that the Government were bringing forward an emergency Budget to implement the windfall tax, but there was no hint that they would also raise taxes on petrol and diesel, which we have dealt with, on pension funds, which we shall deal with tomorrow, and on home owners and all those with mortgages.

The tax is being imposed at a time of rising interest rates. We have had three interest rate rises since the election. The Chancellor has given away the power to fix interest rates, but the responsibility for monetary policy rests with him. There is speculation that a fourth rise may be imminent. The cost of higher interest rates so far on the average borrower is £20 a month. That will rise once more if the Bank of England raises interest rates again. On top of that additional burden on borrowers caused by interest rate rises, the cut in mortgage interest relief will add nearly a further £10 a month for someone with a loan of £30,000 or more—which is the majority.

One of the spurious reasons brought forward for this tax increase is that it is said to be a way of dampening down a housing boom. It is true that house prices in the south-east are rising strongly, but that supposed boom has not yet reached my constituency or many parts of the north of England. If the economy is in danger of being destabilised by a housing boom, the Chancellor should cut this interest relief immediately. Instead, it is to take effect from 6 April next year. If that is his aim, it is not very clever to have such a long delay between the identification of the supposed need and the implementation of the policy.

The restriction on mortgage interest relief is also probably regressive. It is commonly supposed that any such restriction hits the better-off disproportionately. That is no longer the case, because the tax rate allowable has already been restricted to 15 per cent. The time is long past when the main benefit was enjoyed by the well-off or those paying higher rates of income tax.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has observed that, proportionately, the bottom 10 per cent. in income are damaged as much as the richest 10 per cent. That adds to the picture that is already building up that the entire Budget is regressive. That has also been observed by the IFS. Taking into account all the tax changes, particularly all the increases in indirect taxation, the poorest 10 per cent. have suffered the most. We hear about the concern of new Labour for the disadvantaged and the least well-off, but that is not carried through in the Budget, which has the reverse effect.

In the opinion of the IFS, the restriction in mortgage interest relief to 10 per cent. will damage the poorest. That is somewhat of a surprise. The IFS says:

> "Losses at the bottom end of the income distribution are larger than one might first expect, which reflects the low incomes of mortgagers in these poorer groups making their proportionate losses relatively large. These groups are mainly the short-term unemployed, for whom income support does not cover the increase in their mortgage payments. It would be possible to compensate this group by changing the income support rules to cover their mortgage interest payments, as is the case for the longer-term unemployed."

We wait to see whether the Government will act to prevent that regressive effect, by bringing forward changes in the income support rules. If they do not, we can conclude only that they do not mind the regressive nature of the measure or of the Budget as a whole.

We conclude that this measure is a tax-raising measure—no more, no less. It is one of 17 tax increases that we have noted in the Budget. Our amendments push the relief restriction to beyond the next general election, so that, if the Labour party were to choose next time to fight on a platform of that further restriction, the electorate would have a chance to vote against it accordingly.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): On the heralding of the measure in our manifesto, can the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether the previous Government heralded in their 1992 manifesto the subsequent reduction in MIRAS?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The point that I was making, which I notice the hon. Lady did not dispute, was that if the measure has a macro-economic rationale, it is undermined by the fact that the suppression of the alleged housing boom will not take place until the boom is all over. Therefore, by implication, she agrees with me about that.

I do not know whether the hon. Lady attended our earlier debates, but we had some predictably barren exchanges about various tax increases in various Parliaments, during which it was established beyond doubt that, even if one accepted that we put through 22 tax increases—which we dispute—it compares with 17 that her Government have already brought forward in their first few months of office. We noted that if the Government continue at their present rate, there will be well over 100 increases before they face the electorate again. She would therefore be most unwise to get into any competition about who has put through the most tax increases.

The Opposition believe that the measure is unnecessary and does not have a macro-economic justification, and that its effect will be surprisingly regressive. For those reasons and because we do not believe that an extra £1 billion raid on home owners is justified, we shall—I hope—be pressing the amendment to a Division.

6.30 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I have always tried to avoid making political points, particularly about Budgets, because I appreciate that Governments have a difficult job in trying to balance the books. Although I am sure that the Labour party and its members have the best of intentions, I hope that the Minister will bear it in mind that their policies—sadly, probably because of one of those strange coincidences—often seem to hit the poorest hardest of all.

In Southend-on-Sea, where I live, house prices have risen for what we could call the up-market houses in the small number of up-market areas. On the other hand, there has hardly been any price increase at all for houses of £50,000 and less—and there are many of them. In some areas, there has actually been a fall in house prices.

The sad fact is that the Government's proposal will have the same impact on a house owner, regardless of whether the house is worth £200,000, £300,000 or only £40,000. It will therefore make no difference to someone who is on a high salary or has lots of money, but have a rather devastating effect on those on low incomes who have a low-priced house.

The second worry is that the measure comes after several increases in interest rates. It worries me hugely that, because of the collapse of confidence in currencies in other EC countries, it seems that the Governor of the Bank of England will be constantly putting up interest rates, causing more difficulty and problems for those on low incomes.

With successive rises in interest rates and the mortgage interest relief proposal, there is a real danger that, once again—I believe in 1998 or 1999—there will be a serious problem of falling house prices and rising unemployment. I hope that the Government will be reminded that that is a real problem. It is not a conspiracy of the Labour party; it has been forced on us—sadly—because of circumstances outwith our control.

I have seen horrific examples of misery among people in my constituency who are dealing with negative equity. If we create negative equity once again, which we shall if we continue to pile burdens on home owners, we shall be making a grave mistake. I hope that the Government will think carefully about whether reducing MIRAS to 10 per cent. is a mistake, especially bearing in mind the interest rate increases, which will continue.

In general, I feel rather depressed about the economic situation. When the previous Government were in office, everyone made the great mistake of being too optimistic and of feeling that, somehow, everything was going okay. There is a real danger concerning the value of the pound, which seems likely to rise further simply because, as the Governor of the Bank of England told the Treasury Committee, there is a lack of confidence in the currencies of countries preparing to join the euro. In addition, although we might find that unemployment figures look better because of the special work force scheme that is being introduced, unemployment could rise again.

If we have such a problem with unemployment at the same time as several rises in interest rates and a hole in the tax arrangements, we could be in danger of making a bad problem worse. That is why the amendments tabled by the official Opposition to delay the reduction are wise and prudent.

I appreciate that there is no great point of principle to advance, as what the Government are proposing is exactly what the previous Government did, but on different figures. There is only an issue of tactics and what is right for people who are finding life very hard.

I hope that the Government will bear it in mind that, because the House of Commons is located in London, there is always a temptation to think of housing in relation to London and parts of the south-east generally. There is no doubt that, in London, there have been huge rises in house prices and things are going well, but, sadly, 30 miles away from London, it is remarkably different. I hope that the Government are preparing for a fall in house prices, when a great deal of unnecessary misery will be created.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Clause 15 raises two issues which, as we go through the Bill, seem to be its hallmarks. The first is coherence and competence and the second is honesty or straightforwardness with the electorate.

One can make an extremely respectable economic argument for abolishing MIRAS altogether. It is a distortion of the market. The tax benefits have applied to loans taken out for one specific purpose only. That is not, however, the argument that the Government are making.

One could make an argument for taking the opportunity of this Budget to reduce the value to the borrower of mortgage interest tax relief, on the grounds that the economy is overheating and that consumption is expanding at an unsustainable rate, which is clearly what the Government believe, judging from their analysis of the economy in the Red Book. The Government would be in some difficulty over advancing such an argument because, if they were to do so, it would be logical for the general burden of the Budget to have a negative impact on consumption spending—whereas, in fact, the Budget is pretty neutral about consumption spending.

The reductions in consumer disposable income that will be caused by the reduction in MIRAS and the increase in certain excise duties will effectively be counterbalanced by the reduction in VAT on domestic fuel and additional welfare spending. The Chancellor himself, when I put the question to him in the Treasury Committee—I had to put it to him half a dozen times to get a straight answer—conceded that the Budget is virtually neutral in its effect on consumption. Some £1 billion net will be taken out of consumption which, as I pointed out to him, is only 0.15 per cent. of gross domestic product and will not have an economically significant impact.

The Budget will, however, have an economically significant effect on savings. When the economy is overheating, a sensible Budget stance would be to favour savings or to bear down on consumption, or a mixture of both. Both those directions would get the economy to the same destination. Instead, the Government have imposed an unprecedented levy on savings, by removing dividend tax credits. Therefore, the Government cannot justify the reduction in MIRAS by either of the two arguments that would give it some degree of intellectual respectability. The Government, once again, have made a proposal without a sound and convincing rationale. In short, the measure looks hasty, ill thought through and inconsistent with the rest of

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

the Budget. It is also inconsistent with the Government's analysis of the state of the economy, and it is incompetent. What else is a Budget with all those characteristics?

The second issue that the measure raises is that of honesty and straightforwardness with the public. The Government have given us a lot of rhetoric about being straight and honest. That sounds appealing and attractive and I applaud them for it, but in practice they fought the election criticising the Conservative Administration for introducing taxes in contradiction of their electoral pledges. However, I do not want to go back over that ground, which has been well trodden in previous debates on tax policy, because I would be out of order.

The Labour party said that it would set new standards of straightforwardness with the electorate, but the opposite is the case. It fought the election without mentioning that it intended to reduce the value of MIRAS, which was highly relevant to everybody with a mortgage. As we know, this country has a high rate of owner-occupation, largely as a result of Conservative Governments since the war and, especially, in the past 18 years. We now have more than two thirds—some 70 per cent.—of the population living in owner-occupied accommodation.

Mr. Geraint Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Quentin Davies: I would be disappointed if the hon. Gentleman did not want to intervene in my speech. I would think that I was doing something uncharacteristically wrong. I am delighted that the tradition we have established is being observed, and I give way with pleasure to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Geraint Davies: Did the Conservative party announce in its election pledges the two cuts in MIRAS that it introduced? If it did not—and I can advise him that it did not—is it not sheer hypocrisy that the hon. Gentleman is spouting?

6.45 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies: I am always flattered to be treated in these debates as if I were sitting on the Front Bench. It is a privilege to defend the record of the previous Government, whom I greatly supported in almost everything they did. The cuts to which the hon. Gentleman referred were made some years after the general election. It is one thing, when economic circumstances change considerably—as they did during the previous Parliament—to decide to make a sensible move that is explained at the time, and another to introduce measures within weeks of an election. Indeed, the Labour Government originally intended to have a Budget in the first 10 days of June, so they must have known in May what they proposed to do. They knew perfectly well that they intended to reduce the value of MIRAS, but they withheld that material fact from the electorate during the campaign.

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): Given that the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies) has accused my hon. Friend of hypocrisy—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman did not accuse another hon. Member of hypocrisy, because I would have stopped him if he had. He accused a political party of hypocrisy, and that is different.

Mr. Woodward: I am grateful for the correction, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When the Prime Minister was Leader of the Opposition, he mentioned the blows dealt to home owners by cuts to MIRAS in a speech to the Labour housing conference on 5 March 1996. He said:

> "the effect . . . was to add to insecurity, to destroy confidence in the housing market and to make people much more wary of buying and selling homes."

Does my hon. Friend have a view on hypocrisy in the light of that comment, which was made only a year ago?

Mr. Davies: It is disturbing that the Prime Minister could have forgotten about such a speech a few months later when he was framing the Budget. I shall not use the word hypocrisy because I would be ruled out of order, but such behaviour has a sad tendency to undermine the public's confidence in the integrity of the political process. We owe it to ourselves, our constituents and this place to try to make our actions consistent with our announced precepts.

Mr. Geraint Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Prime Minister made those remarks in the context of the highest levels of negative equity that we have seen and of more repossessions than the highland clearances? It would have been silly to cut MIRAS then, but we are now in a different situation, with the economy overheating and the housing market fast recovering. Therefore, a marginal touch on the brake is sensible and consistent with that contextual change, and the intervention by the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) was wrong.

Mr. Quentin Davies: There are two answers to that. The first is that the Prime Minister made the remarks to which my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) has rightly drawn the House's attention within a year of the election. It is not plausible to suggest that the context is now so different, unless the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies) wants to argue that the mere fact that Labour has come to power, and the consequent prospect of irresponsible management, have undermined confidence in the financial markets, so interest rates have to go up. The second point is that it is not open to the hon. Gentleman to argue for the cut on general principles. If it is a general principle to avoid distortions in the economy, that would be true this year, last year, 10 years ago and in 20 years' time. Therefore, by definition, the Prime Minister should have made that point clear when he was Leader of the Opposition. It is in the nature of principles that they are constant, so that point could have been no less a principle in 1996 than it is now.

The public will not be fooled. They will remember all Labour's rhetoric when it said, "The Tories put up taxes, but we will not." The public will know that that was fundamentally false. They will remember all the rhetoric from the Labour party about honesty in public life and they will see the shabby contrast between that rhetoric and the reality. They will not forgive the Labour party, and nor should it be forgiven.

Mr. Woodward: The hon. Member for Croydon, Central is clearly not acquainted with the facts. By 1996, negative equity had changed significantly. Is he aware of the remarks made in 1995 by the then shadow Chief

Secretary to the Treasury? He described the Conservative party's changes to MIRAS as

"two Tory tax increases . . . These latest tax hikes hit as the Tories continue to argue".

I find it odd that the Labour party could describe such measures as tax increases in 1995, but does not acknowledge that the measure that it is now introducing is undoubtedly a tax increase. Moreover, I do not think that it was in the manifesto.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend is remarkably well informed about the Labour party's unattractive record on the whole matter. I was about to say "dishonourable", Mr. Deputy Speaker, but you would have ruled me out of order. It is indeed unacceptable to use one form of language to describe a measure introduced by a Conservative Administration, and to use a completely different form of language to describe exactly the same phenomenon when it appears under a Labour Government. The reduction in MIRAS either is or is not an increase in taxation. It is certainly a reduction in the disposable income of mortgage borrowers—there can be no conceivable doubt about that—but, while we understand the use of the phrase "an increase in taxation", those who use it must be consistent, and continue to refer to an increase in taxation when they themselves take such action. I do not think that anyone can quarrel with such logic, and it is sad that the Labour Government are not willing to follow it through.

In other circumstances, the measure could have been defended reasonably and, I think, convincingly. The way in which the Labour Government have introduced it, however, raises serious questions about their competence, about the consistency of their Budget measures and about the appropriateness of the aggregate effect of the Budget—that is, the Budget stance as a whole as it affects the present state of the economy. There is a clear contradiction—to which I have drawn attention in debates on other clauses—between the diagnosis and the proposed prescription.

Mr. Geraint Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that, in 1995, the then Government cut MIRAS twice, during a period in which interest rates were going up and there was a good deal of negative equity, along with a good many repossessions? That continued, albeit to a lesser extent, into 1996, when the present Prime Minister made his comments. In that context, the decision was wrong; but, at a time when the economy is overheating, and when greater consumer buoyancy and confidence are reflected in the markets, is not the change in MIRAS right and consistent?

Mr. Quentin Davies: The hon. Gentleman clearly did not listen to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Witney, who knows a good deal about the subject. He has pointed out that at the relevant time, in 1995—and the same has been the case for some years—negative equity was falling. It has fallen to a remarkable extent, year on year. The hon. Gentleman's argument collapses when confronted with reality, as so many Labour arguments have appeared to do during today's debate.

Let me return to the central principles that underlie so much of this ill-thought-through Budget. As I have said, this issue raises major questions about the Government's competence and the appropriateness of the Budget as a whole. It also poses an enormous question mark—one which should greatly embarrass the Government—over their straightforwardness with the electorate. Is it possible to listen to Labour Ministers' public statements, to take them seriously and to think that they will be reflected in the Labour Government's actions in a few months or, indeed, a few weeks?

The answer, clearly—and sadly for the reputation for integrity of politics in this country—is no. My hon. Friend the Member for Witney has a whole list of quotations from the last few months, which make it plain that the electorate were misled by the Labour party, when it was in opposition, about what the party proposed to do in a number of respects, but specifically about MIRAS. We must all feel sad about that. I hope that members of the Labour party, and specifically its representatives in the House—Front Benchers and Back Benchers alike—feel a degree of embarrassment and sadness, because that is the appropriate response to a measure of this kind.

Before I became a Member of Parliament, I used to earn my living in the City. Serious penalties were imposed on anyone who, for example, engaged in a capital-raising exercise—floating a company, or raising a rights or debt issue—and made misleading statements about his or her long-term intentions with regard to the management of the business, the use of the money to be raised or the factors that were likely to have an impact on the company's profitability or its ability to service the loan. Those were serious matters. Had any statements been made in previous months or years that needed to be corrected, they would have had to be corrected explicitly in the prospectus, so that potential investors reading it were not deceived about the true intentions or views of those who were asking for their money. That principle is taken very seriously in the financial markets, and thank goodness it is.

Mr. Geraint Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Quentin Davies: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not. I want to end my speech. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have every opportunity to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, although the Labour Government have unfortunately left us with far too little time to consider clause 15 or any other clause. I do not think that I can be blamed for that, however much else I may be blamed for.

The discipline to which I have referred—ensuring that responsible people do not deceive those whom they ask for support—does not seem to be observed in the Labour party. The Labour party came to the electorate during the campaign, made a good many criticisms of the Conservative Government—from which certain Labour policy priorities could be inferred—and made a number of commitments. It is clear that its commitments not to raise taxes were not observed, and that the inferences that might reasonably be drawn from its criticisms of the Conservative Government were wrongly drawn by the electorate. All the speeches and comments quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Witney, which imply that Labour was opposed to Conservative progressive reductions in MIRAS, were fundamentally deceptive. Labour was not opposed to those reductions at all; indeed, it clearly intended to reduce MIRAS as soon as it came to power.

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

I leave the final question to the Financial Secretary, who I assume will sum up the debate shortly. Do the Labour Government intend to abolish MIRAS altogether? There may be sound reasons for doing so, as long as such action is based on clear principles. If the Financial Secretary has that intention, will she now—belatedly, perhaps—be straightforward enough to tell the House and the country so? Will she say whether this is just the first tranche, and whether the intention is to get rid of MIRAS altogether in a year or two? Then we shall all know where we are, and it will be not only a victory for honesty in the Government but a great advantage for householders. Those who borrow by means of a mortgage, or intend to do so, will know where they stand. They will be able to make their family commitments without the fear that their assumptions will be undercut by yet another unannounced and unexplained U-turn by the Labour Government.

If the Financial Secretary does not make it clear in this debate where she stands on that matter, but, in a year or so, defends the final removal of MIRAS to the House, she will not be able to get away with saying that it can be argued for on the basis of general principles. We shall say that it was disingenuous of her to argue one or two years before for simply a cut to 10 per cent. and not tell us that it was part of her long-term strategy to abolish MIRAS altogether. At least in this debate, may we have a greater measure of frankness than we have had from the Government so far on the issue?

7 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): The Liberal Democrats have supported Conservative amendments to Finance Bills on their technical merits on a good many occasions. There have been many such amendments, but this is not one.

I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) who, in his introductory remarks and his conclusion, made a cogent case for the phasing out of mortgage interest tax relief. There has been a broad consensus across all the parties that that should be done on its economic merits. The previous Government introduced the gradual erosion of the benefits of that tax relief, partly by cutting the rate from 25 to 15 per cent. and, more gradually, but equally effectively, by freezing the nominal rate at which interest was allowable. In real terms, with inflation, the benefits were gradually reduced. There were good reasons why that should have happened and why there should have been a consensus in the House that the phasing-out process should continue. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford made those points.

MIRAS is a distortion in the market in favour of purchase and against both private and social renting. Moreover, it encourages house purchasers to treat their homes not simply as homes but as speculative assets. We recognise the political difficulties of dealing with the problem suddenly, dramatically and painfully, which is why we have all accepted a gradual phase-out. The Government are continuing that process and they should be encouraged to do so.

The only contrary argument that could hold water is that this is a particularly bad time to phase out the relief. Actually, it is a good time because although interest rates are rising, they are relatively low, certainly in terms of what they were at the peak of the cycle. If there is a good time to do it, this is it.

Moreover, as has been argued, the housing market is becoming overheated. As several hon. Members have said, that is an uneven process. The market is not a general, undifferentiated whole—bits of it are still depressed. As a general trend, however, that has to be dealt with and it is appropriate that it should be dealt with by, for example, the stamp duty measure.

In addition, we are dealing with a broader economic context in that, as we have urged Labour Members to accept, there is a general overheating of the economy. The measure will take some consumer spending out of the economy. In our view, it will not be enough, which is why crucial public services are having to bear so much of the burden. If the measure were not enacted and consumer spending were not reduced in this way, the Bank of England committee that now looks at monetary policy would be forced to raise interest rates by even more than it will probably raise them within the next month or so, inflicting even greater hardship on manufacturing industry. We believe that that should be accommodated within the household sector, not by industry.

The Government are right to do this—they have probably not done anything right enough in that respect. My only caveat is to reflect the spirit of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). As we all know, there is hardship in the housing market, which is why the Government should say how they propose to deal with that hardship—with low-income groups and people who still face repossession—when dealing with the amendment.

We are well aware that the Government inherited a set of retrograde housing benefit regulations. The changes two years ago made it much more difficult for people with mortgages who were faced with redundancy to cope with the crisis. We hope that mortgage benefit will be dealt with much more progressively. That, coupled with a continuing phase-out of MIRAS relief, would be an appropriate and timely combination of policies.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): This MIRAS—this market-distorting tax relief—was designed precisely to encourage greater home ownership because of the socially responsible attitudes that went with that. In that respect, MIRAS has been remarkably successful. Throughout the period in which the subsidy has been available, home ownership has grown remarkably. So what has changed? Are we no longer willing to support that subsidy? Do we no longer want to encourage people to own their homes?

In Committee, I found it extraordinary that Labour Members suddenly began to announce that they had always favoured the abolition of the relief in its entirety. When they were challenged on whether they had shared their enthusiasm with their electorate in their election addresses, the retort was that there was simply not enough space available in which to do so.

Moving on to all the talk about the housing market, there is no housing market—there are a number of discrete markets that operate quite differently. As we have heard, there is still a severe problem at the bottom end of the market and these measures will most severely affect those living in that end of the market and trying to sell their homes or pay their mortgages. The £10 or so a month that it will cost the average mortgage payer is significant for precisely those people who are struggling and have to meet the extra £20 or so consequent on the increases in interest rates that have already taken place. The Prime Minister, as Leader of the Opposition, was reassuring the people who have such difficulties when he said at the back end of last year:

> "We have no intention of raising taxes at all."

They were reassured and they are the people for whom Labour used to speak. It is precisely those people on whom these measures will have the greatest and most adverse effect.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): The crucial point is that, just three months ago, the Labour party presented the electorate with the proposal that the ordinary person would not suffer an increase in taxation. This measure is an increase in taxation of £100 a year and it will particularly affect the ordinary young family. It comes at the wrong time. Interest rates may be low in nominal terms, but they are high in real terms and about to go higher. That £100 a year will become £250 with the rise in interest rates.

The most important argument is this: when the previous Conservative Government reduced MIRAS, the reduction was mainly progressive. As tax allowability came down to 20 per cent., only the better off suffered. For people paying a 20 per cent. rate of tax, the reduction was entirely neutral. As has been pointed out, the reduction becomes acutely regressive as one goes below 20 per cent. I would have preferred us not to cut the relief from 20 to 15 per cent. when we were in government.

Now, the boot is being put in on two fronts—higher interest rates and MIRAS—for less well-off, ordinary young families. Many of those are the very people who suffered negative equity. As my hon. Friends have said, frequently it is at the bottom end of the market that house prices have not recovered. There are huge regional differences. We have heard all this talk of housing boom, but, in general, the housing market has not recovered from the crash of the past eight years.

The Labour Government propose to hit many young families because of the illusion that they are part of some economic machine of a housing boom that does not exist for them because they have only just recovered from negative equity.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) asked the equally important question: do we wish to discourage home ownership? Going back the days of more generous interest relief on mortgages, the whole point of doing that was to encourage home ownership and the sense of social responsibility that went with it. What is left of that tax encouragement is pretty small, but it is relevant, not to the better-off, but to the less well-off and their families.

The measure is just a cynical way of raising nearly £1 billion in tax and it comes at the wrong time. To impose it, not two or three years, but only three months, after the Government won an election in which ordinary people were made to believe that their taxes would not go up is wrong. The Labour party will pay at the next election for proceeding with this misguided increase in the taxation of ordinary people.

Mr. Woodward: I find myself at a loss to understand the point of clause 15. I am struck by the inconsistency in the Government's argument throughout much of the Bill; it is encapsulated in the hypocrisy and lack of consistency in clause 15. I and my constituents in Witney want to ask: why introduce this phasing out now and what its real significance? Is it a way of saying to people that the Government are going to phase out MIRAS altogether? If so, why have the Government not had the courage to say so or even to carry it through now?

I find myself wondering about the rationale behind the reduction and I should be grateful if the Financial Secretary explained that rationale to the House. What is the purpose of taking this action now? Is it part of a phasing out of mortgage interest relief at source for home owners throughout the country?

The onus is on the Government to own up, because the measure was not contained in their manifesto. In the manifesto, we read lots of wonderful glossy promises accompanied by lots of wonderful glossy pictures, but we see little mention of tax increases, yet the reduction in MIRAS is a tax increase. Labour promised to include in its manifesto all its intended tax increases: this measure was not in the manifesto, yet, within two months of Labour coming to power, in it comes. The reduction in MIRAS is a significant tax increase because it will hit something in the order of 10.5 million home owners. It will also hit many of those who are thinking of buying a home for the first time. About 400,000 people bought a home for the first time in 1995-96 and I remember that, when I bought my first home in 1983, MIRAS was a helpful tool for someone like me, who did not have any money or a financial background to rely on. It was a way of helping people like me to buy their own home.

I firmly agree with my hon. Friends, especially my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West, that MIRAS was introduced to encourage home ownership. We have endured a difficult period of negative equity, although I have to correct the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies) by pointing out that the heights of negative equity were reached in 1992-93 and had dramatically changed by 1995-96.

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): If the hon. Gentleman believes that MIRAS was brought in to encourage home ownership, why did the Conservative Government—his Government—cut it twice?

7.15 pm

Mr. Woodward: My point concerns the inconsistency and hypocrisy of the current Government's case. On another occasion, I should be more than happy to explain at length my views on reducing mortgage interest relief at source within a clear policy. I do not understand the Labour Government's rationale and I am seeking an explanation. In case the hon. Gentleman has not realised, he is now in government—he has to provide the answers for the 10.5 million people up and down the United Kingdom who will be affected by the change. It is terribly important that the Government understand that there is a limited period during which they can simply apportion blame to the Conservatives. The hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg) needs to become accustomed to the idea that Labour Members must now explain why their Government introduce hypocritical measures.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The thrust of my hon. Friend's speech is that the reduction in the rate of MIRAS will

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

affect those at the bottom end of the housing market, especially first-time buyers. Surely it was right to restrict the relief to basic rate taxpayers, as we did. We took it away from those paying the top rate of tax, but left it for basic rate taxpayers. Does my hon. Friend agree that the reduction of the relief will force younger people to save for a longer period before making their first home purchase?

Mr. Woodward: My hon. Friend makes a series of important points and the hon. Member for Halton would do well to pay attention. The Chancellor said that he intended to dampen the housing boom—he was obviously aware of the boom in the south-east. However, I am conscious of the fact that the housing boom and changes in housing policy are occurring all over the United Kingdom and it is my view—I should be interested in hearing whether Treasury Ministers share that view—that we should know exactly what the impact of the reduction in MIRAS will be on people living outside the south-east. What will the impact be on people living in the north of England or in Scotland? What will the impact be on those living in houses at the bottom end of the market—the poorest people to have made the decision, which I firmly support, to buy their own home?

I am at a loss to reconcile the Government's action with the Chancellor's statement that:

> "I will not allow house prices to get out of control and put at risk the sustainability of the recovery."—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1997; Vol. 297, c. 313.]

If the recovery is indeed at risk, that is not because of changes in the MIRAS rates, but because of what is happening to the value of the pound. The Chancellor will declare that it is not his decision to raise interest rates, but the House will not forget the day the Chancellor gifted operational control of interest rates to the Bank of England, without even so much as a reference to the House until after doing so.

In future years, it will be all very well for the Chancellor to say, "It was not my fault", but it will be his fault, because it was his decision to give away operational control of interest rates and it is the level of interest rates that hurts home owners. As we are about to witness the fourth rise in interest rates in barely more than eight weeks since the Labour Government came to power, home owners will be hurt twice by the measure before us. For those who live in the north of England, Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, the measure is a cruel one, which will greatly damage those who bought their own home.

Mr. Derek Twigg: On the issue of hurting home owners, would the hon. Gentleman care to comment on the hundreds of thousands of people who suffered negative equity and the hundreds of thousands of people who lost their homes under the previous Government? Whose fault does he think that was?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are starting to stray from the amendment, which is about the MIRAS scheme and not about repossession.

Mr. Woodward: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is important for members of the Treasury team to sit down and consider whether abrogating responsibility for operational control of interest rates is a good or bad idea at a moment like this. I have already explained the relevance of the clause to the interest rate rises. The truth is that interest rates will continue to rise in the next few months. Of course, this weekend some excellent advice was given by the general secretary of the GMB, whose knowledge of economic practices is exceptional. He advised on GMTV that the pound should be linked to the Italian lira because the markets might then think that the pound is not so strong. That is quite right, but unfortunately it has always been the practice of those on the Conservative Benches to be cautious of taking advice from that gentleman.

The truth is that interest rates are the means by which people in this country can be hurt because, for most, the biggest expenditure of their lives is the purchase of their home. The proposal to cut MIRAS will hurt those people at a time when some are still recovering from a prolonged and difficult recession. The hon. Member for Halton may not have noticed that that recession occurred the world over and hit people in every western economy.

Mr. Derek Twigg: What about black Wednesday?

Mr. Woodward: I will not comment on that, because I suspect that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would immediately rule that it was out of order and not relevant to the amendment.

The hon. Gentleman must recognise that people do not understand the rationale behind the Government's decision. They need an explanation of whether the reduction in MIRAS is part of a policy to axe it. Home owners want the answer to that question.

The Financial Secretary has made much in her speeches about the need for certainty and people's need to be able to plan. If one is making the biggest purchase of one's life, which represents the most important commitment that any family will make, one has a right to plan and a right to certainty. I do not understand whether the proposed reduction is part of a plan to abolish MIRAS. We have been offered no clear rationale for the Government's decision.

Today, it has been said that the Government will look at the business of buying and selling houses. A cross-departmental review of house-selling practices will lead to legislation to regulate what has been described by hon. Members as the buoyant housing market. The Government will compile case studies of individual buyers and sellers. I dare say that the Savorets of Islington will provide a useful case study for the Government to examine. When they finish looking at that case, they will appreciate that those people were lucky enough to benefit from being able to buy a house worth £625,000 in Islington. The blunt truth is that the phased reduction of mortgage interest relief will not greatly affect those who are able to afford to spend hundreds of thousands of pounds on a house.

For those trying to buy their first home, costing between £30,000 and £50,000, MIRAS makes the crucial difference—the difference between being able to buy a house or staying in rented accommodation. I am aware that, until quite recently, it was Labour policy to prevent people from buying their own homes.

Apparently, that conviction was easily shed so that the Labour party could get into power. Now we search for the Government's new rationale towards home ownership. Is it something that they will encourage or punish people for?

In the interests of clarity and honesty, I would greatly welcome hearing from the Financial Secretary whether the MIRAS reduction is a one-off or part of a policy to phase it out at source. When can the 10.5 million home owners expect that policy to be effected and completed?

Dawn Primarolo: The Conservative Government cut mortgage interest relief six times—on a number of occasions when interest rates were rising. I do not recall hearing Conservative Members voice their concern for those who then found themselves in negative equity or who lost their homes because of the housing boom. I remind those hon. Members that, even with the recent increases in interest rates and allowing for the reduction in mortgage interest relief, payments on a typical mortgage of £50,000 are still £250 a month less than they were when the Conservative Government presided over the boom and peak in interest rates.

Every hon. Member knows that those who own their own homes, or aspire to do so, are haunted by the prospect of a housing boom and the negative equity and the repossessions that go with that. The Government's measures on mortgage interest relief have been welcomed by the Council of Mortgage Lenders, which described the Budget package as prudent, and by the Halifax building society, which said that the measures would allow steady growth in the housing market. The difference is that, according to the Halifax index, house prices in the three months to June were up 2.1 per cent. on the previous three months and up 6.8 per cent. on a year earlier. Most commentators expect that there will be similar rises in the next year. Although those rises will be uneven, they will be spread across all the regions.

The measures proposed by the Government on mortgage interest relief and stamp duty will apply a gentle brake on the housing market. They are also designed to provide it with some stability to avoid the boom over which the Conservative Government presided, with all the misery that went with it.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Lady says that her Government have the monopoly on the care of those in negative equity. Surely every interest rate rise makes it all the more difficult for those in negative equity to earn their way out of it. The combined effect of the four interest rate rises since the election and the proposed reduction in MIRAS will make it even more difficult for those in negative equity to get out of it.

Dawn Primarolo: I would not suggest for a moment that Labour Members are the only ones with a monopoly on care for those on low incomes. I was pointing out that, in government, Conservative Members were less vocal and their actions did not follow the prescriptions that they are now recommending to the Government. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that it is necessary to act on the housing market before matters get out of hand instead of waiting until they are completely out of control and then standing by, wringing our hands and saying how sorry we are.

I accept that the impact of the MIRAS reduction will hit low-income families, but their mortgages tend to be low, so the impact will not be as great for them. It is essential for those families to have the security of the knowledge that there will not be a runaway housing market because the Government are taking prudent measures to ensure that that does not happen.

Mr. Woodward: The hon. Lady has yet again made much of security and certainty. Would she care to explain to hon. Members how tax changes, in particular the four increases in interest rates in three months, will add to people's sense of security and certainty?

Dawn Primarolo: The increases in interest rates are a result of the mess that the previous Government left us to clear up. The previous Government did not take the advice that they were given before the general election, so it is necessary to act now. The electorate can rest assured in the knowledge that the Labour Government will take the difficult decisions to ensure economic stability.

Amendment No. 27, which would delay implementation of the MIRAS cut, is ridiculous. As we have said, it is necessary to try to dampen down the housing market to protect those in the market and to ensure that those who aspire to home ownership can do so on terms that they can afford, in the knowledge that the market is slowing down.

7.30 pm

Conservative Members make their proposals from the security of the Opposition Benches, not the reality of dealing with the economic circumstances. The Government will not shrink from taking the difficult decisions to protect stability, especially in housing. I recommend that the House votes against the amendments and supports the Government in their strategy.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: These debates are settling into a familiar pattern: we ask the questions and the Financial Secretary cannot or will not answer them. However, it is not an entirely fruitless exercise because, from her silence and her failure to answer our points, we have established beyond dispute some important facts.

First, clause 15 is a major breach of the tax pledges that Labour made at the time of the general election. Secondly, we have established that the measure is regressive. It hits the poorest 10 per cent. of people in the country more than the richest 10 per cent. Thirdly, the measure fails to deal with the supposed housing boom—if that was the intention—because it does not come into effect until 6 April 1998. Fourthly, it is simply a crude, tax-raising measure. It will net the Treasury nearly £1 billion a year extra and it will do so at a time when interest rates are and will be rising strongly.

So borrowers, all 10 million of them, will be hit twice—by the increase in their mortgage contributions and by the withdrawal of, or further limitation of, tax relief. Above all—

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most significant questions that the Financial Secretary was unable or unwilling to answer

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

was whether the reduction in MIRAS should be regarded as one tranche in the process of the elimination of MIRAS or as a one-off exercise which would not be repeated?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. I remember his specifically asking the Financial Secretary that question and she specifically refused to answer. I agree that her silence and her evasion on that subject are eloquent. We fear the worst. The Labour Government are breaking all their tax promises in their first Budget and are likely to continue to do so. That is the implication of what my hon. Friend asked.

Above all, the measure is yet another imposition—a damaging and continuing one—on the ordinary people of this country, the borrowers, the people who try to think long, who borrowed money to build an asset of their own. They have been clobbered in the first Budget, in defiance of all those promises that were repeated not only by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but by the Prime Minister, in the weeks before the general election. I shall therefore invite my hon. Friends to press the amendment to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 128, Noes 363.

Division No. 69] **[7.33 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir David Madel and
Mr. James Cran.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard *(Shef'ld Hallam)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Thomas
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
(Copeland)
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim

Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Mrs Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie *(Scarborough)*
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Webb, Professor Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John McFall and
Ms Bridget Prentice.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 17

WITHDRAWAL OF RELIEF ON MEDICAL INSURANCE PREMIUMS

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 10, line 29, at end insert 'and'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 10, leave out lines 32 to 36.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

No. 5, in page 10, line 41, at end insert 'and'.

No. 3, in page 10, line 43, after 'contract', insert

'and in each case the contract is for a period of not more than 12 months'.

No. 6, in page 10, leave out from beginning of line 44 to end of line 3 on page 11.

No. 4, in page 11, line 4, after 'section', insert—

'(i) where the insurer has agreed to issue a continuous monthly series of contracts in a form previously approved by the Inland Revenue then each in such series of contracts shall be treated as part of one whole contract commencing on the first day of the first contract in the series and ending on the last day of the last contract in the series and each monthly payment thereunder shall be treated as a part of the whole payment under that contract, and

(ii).'.

Mr. St. Aubyn: The amendment raises some technical points but also some issues that are fundamental not only to clause 17 but to the whole way in which the Bill has been framed and forced through the House.

On 16 July, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and I discussed a number of important cases of private medical insurance for which the intentions of clause 17 were not adequately clear. We identified three types of medical insurance. The first is verbal contracts entered into before the cut-off date mentioned in the clause—2 July—but where the confirmatory documentation had come after that date. The second is contract renewals, where an insurance company's client had agreed before 2 July the contract renewal of an insurance policy for another year, but where the contract came into effect after 2 July.

The third type of contract, and by far the greatest number—in the case of one insurer, almost half of its business is written in this way—consists of annual contracts written as a series of monthly contracts. This method of writing insurance contracts has been approved by the Inland Revenue because it avoids some of the complications of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. It is an entirely legitimate and approved way of doing business, yet clause 17 is unclear about how such contracts would be treated. Would the relief end at the end of the next month and at the start of the next monthly contract, or would it carry through to the end of the series of monthly contracts?

Those were the points which we put to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. We did not ask for an immediate response. We understand that they are technical points. The hon. Lady was free to go away and think about the matter before clarifying to us what the clause was intended to do. But she wasted no time in putting my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry and me firmly in our place. She said that we simply had not read the clause clearly, and that if there were any doubts, the answers would be found in the explanatory notes from the Inland Revenue.

My hon. Friend and I reread the clause and the explanatory notes, but I am sorry to say that we found nothing dealing with verbal contracts, nothing that resolved our concerns about contract renewals and nothing at all about monthly contracts. We were grievously misled, albeit perhaps unintentionally, by the words of the Financial Secretary.

If one reads *Hansard*, there is no doubt that we were given assurances that the answers would be found, but they were not to be found. If ambiguous clauses are put together in haste, as part of a Budget put together in haste, it is no use complaining if others do not grasp the intended meaning of the clauses. When others ask for clarification of the meaning, it is not good enough to hide behind official documents and statements that do not answer the specific questions raised.

I raised the matter with the Leader of the House, who told me in the Chamber that the correct forum for discussing it would be at a later stage in the proceedings on the Bill. So we are here tonight, in the correct forum to discuss how those important cases are to be treated.

The assurances that I hope we will get from the Financial Secretary must depend of the credibility of her words. Will she take this opportunity to correct another misstatement that we heard on 16 July? In the process of dismissing our concerns, which still exist, the Financial Secretary said:

"There is no indication that those who have private medical insurance and receive relief will change their minds because of our decision."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 1997; Vol. 298, c. 417.]

My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry pointed out that there had been a report recently from the Economists Advisory Group which made it clear that the withdrawal of the relief would have an effect on the numbers who take out private medical insurance. We know as the result of a letter from one of the insurance companies that the Financial Secretary had received a copy of that report in mid-May, yet she told us in July that there was "no indication" of the effect of the relief being withdrawn.

Did the Financial Secretary utter those words because she failed to read that important report on the effects of withdrawing relief on medical insurance, or because she failed to remember what she had read in the report, or did she simply fail to tell us, even though she had read the report and she did remember it? Perhaps she will let us know in which sense she misled us on this vital point.

There is an irony about clause 17 coming from a Government who claim to govern for the many, not the few. The irony arises from the clause, coupled with the relief on the rate of VAT on fuel. The combined effect of those two measures is regressive. Although the savings on fuel will benefit most those who spend the most on fuel, the study that I mentioned and others that I have received from insurance companies make it clear that—

Jacqui Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the definition of regressive taxation is based on the proportion of a person's income that the tax takes, not the absolute amount? Therefore, because VAT takes a larger proportion of the income of those on lower incomes, it is regressive. It is not the absolute amount but the proportion that matters.

Mr. St. Aubyn: If the hon. Lady will wait a moment, she will realise that the combination of measures is indeed regressive. Studies have shown that waiting lists will go up as a result of the measure. Some people will not be able to afford the premiums without the tax relief.

They will go back to depending solely on the national health service, and when they need treatment, they will add to waiting lists.

According to the report that I mentioned, an increase of 30,000 a year on waiting lists will be the first result of the measure, and those numbers will be concentrated. Everyone—not just the few, but the many—will have to wait longer if they want a hip replacement operation, cataract procedures, a coronary bypass or other operations commonly required by elderly people, many of whom never aspired to private medical insurance, but all of whom will be affected as those who had such insurance revert to reliance on the health service and add to the waiting lists.

Liz Blackman: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that insurance companies such as the Norwich Union already have advertisements in the newspapers stressing that there will be virtually no impact on their customers? They calculate that the impact will be virtually nil and that they will retain their customers.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am sure that the hon. Lady is old enough to know that one should not believe everything that one reads in an advertisement. However, if one is so under the spell of people who are in love with advertising, such a mistake is understandable.

Many prominent insurance companies have written to me, to my hon. Friends and to others, making it clear that although they will try to mitigate the effect of the change by offering people restricted cover, which they can do on terms that do not substantially increase the premiums, the collective effect of restricting the cover means that certain expensive medical procedures will not be covered, and when those operations are required by some of their clients, they will have to be performed on the NHS. The burden on the NHS will be spread over the entire community, and the waiting lists for the entire community will increase. We should be in no doubt about that.

Who will gain from the withdrawal of the relief and the loss of money for health spending? Those who will gain are those with the largest homes, who have the biggest heating bills. I think of people such as the Paymaster General. He has a very large house in my constituency, which is one of his many houses; I wish him well. It is, however, an irony that he is one of the people who will benefit the most from this combination of measures while other people, who are much poorer than he and who struggle to provide for their health needs through their health insurance policies, will no longer benefit. They regret that they will add to the burden on the national health service and they regret that, having provided for themselves for so many years, when they are most likely to need the help of their insurance policy, they will have to give up paying the premiums. That is a very sorry tale.

8 pm

Mr. Caplin: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House how many people who have taken out such insurance will be affected? I have listened to him for 13 minutes now and he has not given us any facts.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that according to the Inland Revenue's own figures—indeed, those who read the explanatory notes will know this—about 600,000 individuals have policies. According to the industry, typically, the number of people affected by a policy is two so we are talking about upwards of 1 million people who benefit from medical insurance policies. The industry's further estimate is that withdrawing the relief entirely will mean that almost half those individuals will give up the health insurance that they have today. If the figures are even a fraction of that, the savings from abolishing the relief will be wiped out by the increased costs loaded on to the national health service. What makes this measure particularly painful for the health service is that none of the savings will be channelled into the health service. They will be channelled into a reduction of VAT on fuel.

The manner in which the Financial Secretary has dealt with our objections has smacked of pride. The manner in which the clause has been introduced smacks of prejudice. I am afraid that not even Jane Austen could easily write a happy ending to this tale. Let us, however, try.

Despite my criticisms of the Financial Secretary—I know that she is new to her post and I realise that it is difficult to get to grips with such a big job—I am grateful for her letter to me of 25 July. The letter, although it patronises me, is nevertheless helpful in clarifying the situation and I am only sorry that it did not come earlier. I should like to clarify one or two points in the letter and if the understanding I have reached is correct, having heard from her and from others in the debate, I may be prepared not to press some of my amendments.

The first point that the Financial Secretary makes is that the transitional provisions of clause 17, which phase out the relief during the year as annual contracts come to an end,

> "apply only where there is no contract in place before Budget Day."

That is a very significant statement because the letter goes on to say that

> "the relief is withdrawn . . . in respect of all contracts made on or after Budget Day. Contracts made before then are not affected."

If I understand the Financial Secretary correctly, her letter means that the significant date is not the date from which the next contract runs, which might be after 2 July, but the date on which the contract was agreed. That is the type of contract we are talking about when we refer to telephone confirmations of contracts that were made before 2 July, but for which the documentary evidence was not completed until afterwards. The letter would appear to cover that.

The letter also appears to cover the case where a renewal has been put through to a client of an insurance company and the renewal has been confirmed by the client before 2 July. The contract is made, but the start date of the contract may be some weeks after 2 July.

The third and most important group, because it is the largest group of contracts about which we are concerned in our questions to the Financial Secretary, is monthly contracts. In her letter, the Financial Secretary states

> "There is no suggestion . . . that monthly contracts are to be treated differently."

The problem we have is that the way in which some monthly contracts are written by some insurers, including Prime Health, an insurer in my constituency and one of the largest, does not marry up with the way in which the clause is written.

Since I and my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry raised the matter in the House on 16 July, Prime Health and others, I am delighted to say, have had verbal

[Mr. St. Aubyn]

assurances from the Inland Revenue that all their monthly contracts, however they are written, will be treated like annual contracts and that the relief will continue until the end of the series of contracts is completed because they have been approved by the Revenue. That is extremely good news.

There is, however, an extremely important principle here. Shall we see the regulation of taxation carried out by regulatory, bureaucratic fiat—by verbal assurances behind closed doors—or shall taxation rules be decided on the Floor of the House in open debate? That is what amendment No. 4 is about. Whether the matter is agreed by the Inland Revenue by verbal assurance or whether it is agreed here affects not only the certainty of the agreement, but the way in which we conduct business.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Another, wider, point is that the verbal assurances were given to only one taxpayer. Those verbal assurances are needed by other taxpayers who face a similar problem. We are discussing a fundamental principle of the rule of law and my hon. Friend was absolutely right to table his amendments.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall listen with great interest to what the Financial Secretary says in due course. I know that she is uncomfortable about the idea, but it may help her to realise that we feel that on two occasions, we were misled by her during the debate on 16 July. Opposition to the amendment would not only be highly misleading in the light of the assurances from officers of the Inland Revenue, but would, more importantly, for the reasons that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) have explained, be an abuse of the process by which we determine statute on financial affairs in this Chamber.

If the Financial Secretary is willing to accept the amendment and to give the assurances that we seek, all will be forgiven, all will be sweetness and light, and the insurance industry will have come to a happy understanding. The ball is firmly in her court.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): The whole House owes a debt of gratitude and admiration to my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) first, for his pursuit of this matter in such detail, secondly, for his elegance and lucidity in bringing it to the attention of the House tonight and thirdly, for his pointing out the salient issues raised by the amendment.

The purpose of the amendments has already been admirably explained by my hon. Friend. It is, essentially, to elucidate and, if possible, correct aspects of the Government's proposals on the implementation of the withdrawal of private medical insurance relief. Those issues, as well as the general ones, were the subject of exchanges in the House between the Financial Secretary and us on Wednesday 16 July. I shall come back to those points of detail later.

On the wider issues of private medical insurance, suffice it to say, particularly as my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford has spoken most eloquently, that we simply do not believe that the Government have succeeded in proving their argument that there will be real savings to the Exchequer from these proposals. We believe that savings will be substantially nullified by a significant return of policyholders to the national health service. We believe also that those arguments are well advanced in the economists advisory group report. If there are savings, and even to the extent to which they are borne out in practice as a result of the Government's measures, there will be a loss of revenue to the Exchequer, an increased load on the NHS and ultimately a detriment to those who have to rely on the NHS because they currently hold no private medical insurance.

Be that as it may, and given that the Government are bent on the withdrawal of private medical insurance, it is clearly desirable that the withdrawal of relief should be fair in its implementation and that every effort should be made to get things right. That is surely the right approach.

Our earlier exchanges sadly revealed what is being seen to be the Government's characteristic approach to matters of detail. I do not know whether they adopt such an approach because they are careless of the consequences on individuals. Perhaps, to be less charitable, they are themselves uncertain of detail. If they are, I shall be charitable to them in this instance because I recognise that we are dealing with complicated issues.

I have noticed more than once, however, during the passage of the Bill that we have been told by Ministers that it is all entirely clear—usually in the new clauses because not even a tax expert could possibly say it was perfectly clear from the Bill. Even my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) has had some difficulty with certain aspects of the Bill.

Having been told that everything is perfectly clear, we poor souls have to admit that it is not entirely clear to us and that we still do not understand it. That was the way in which the Financial Secretary, for whatever reason, chose to respond to points made with a degree of modesty and diffidence by my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton and myself in Committee on the Floor of the House. Indeed, that is why we are returning to these matters this evening.

I do not know how the occupants of the Treasury Bench saw their role as the Labour party in opposition. We, the present Opposition, however, are prepared, up to the limits of our ability, to tackle the Bill and to listen to advice and expressions of concern from professional persons, given the impact of the Bill. We shall then seek to query details and offer improvements.

If I have one piece of advice for the Government, it is that they should not raise their hackles and assume on principle and in advance that all Opposition amendments are necessarily wrecking in nature and always wrong. Given the Government's haste in the sorry business of the Bill, we from time to time—I say this assuredly to the Financial Secretary—are trying to help the Government to get their legislation right. To be more accurate, perhaps I should say that we are doing our best to protect our constituents from the collateral damage that the Government's carelessness and haste have inflicted in general.

It is in that context that the three detailed issues brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford should be carefully considered. As my hon. Friend has explained, they relate to three specific categories of private medical insurance. First, there is the category of policy taken out in sequence as a series of discrete policies over 12 months, but not as one period with monthly payments. I believe that the reason for that approach in some instances may be the operation of consumer credit legislation. For all practical purposes, however, they are annual policies or, if we must so describe them, quasi-annual policies.

The second category features those insurances that are covered by verbal contract without a confirmation in writing at any particular time, and certainly not at the time of the conclusion of the contract. The contract takes effect before it is confirmed in writing.

The third category features those insurances where renewal has been notified by the policyholder in advance of the deadline of 2 July, but the contract did not enter into force until after that date.

My hon. Friend the Member for Guildford has explained the details of these implications extremely carefully and I do not need to take up his arguments. I shall make three detailed comments, however, before inviting the Financial Secretary to consider the position with me.

8.15 pm

My first point is that the arrangements that we are considering, which have been carried out over a period of years by Prime Health in Guildford and by other insurers elsewhere, were entirely normal within the conduct of their business. There is no question of avoidance action to frustrate the Revenue.

Secondly, until the Chancellor's announcement on 2 July, there was a legitimate expectation on behalf of policyholders that their arrangements would stand until notified to the contrary. Certain undertakings had been entered into along with courses of action and there was the reasonable expectation that those would continue. As I said in Committee, there could be severe difficulties where contracts have been concluded, perhaps on a verbal basis, and tax relief withdrawn if the insurer were to hold the policyholder to a contract that he could no longer afford to maintain.

Thirdly, despite the helpful efforts of the Financial Secretary to clarify the matter, there is still a degree of ambiguity in her letter. We need to return to it to ensure that the points that it incorporates are thoroughly nailed down. In the hon. Lady's letter of 25 July to all members of the Standing Committee, she writes:

> "There is no suggestion that the contracts have to be in writing—this is a matter of general, not tax, law".

Yet previously in that same letter she denied any intention of extending transitional relief:

> "to verbal or monthly contracts or to contracts . . . commencing"

after 2 July.

Against that background, I still do not feel that these matters are as clear as perhaps the House is entitled to wish or as the Financial Secretary will wish to claim. I begin to piece together from an analysis of the Financial Secretary's letter the following scene—I should be grateful if the hon. Lady would harken to it as I think myself through these matters. I ask her to confirm later whether I am right.

First, I am sure that the Financial Secretary is right, although I am not a lawyer, that a contract is a contract is a contract, whether verbal or written. If there were a contract between an insurer and a policyholder, one taken out before 2 July when the Chancellor made his announcement and subsequently confirmed in writing, if it was not written at the time that it was taken out, that contract would stand and would attract tax relief for the period of the contract.

As I understand the Financial Secretary's letter, the main thrust of the clause is about contracts concluded on or after 2 July and not about contracts taken out before that date. The hon. Lady is claiming, however, that she is giving helpful and additional transitional reliefs. The first would be in the instance of a new contract where the understanding was that the contract would be taken out but it had not been signed up to, for whatever reason. The hon. Lady is saying, possibly with the thought in mind that some such contracts may be real pre-2 July contracts but not nailed down in writing, that providing writing appears by 1 August and premiums are paid by the end of March 1998, they would qualify for tax relief for the current year.

The second category comes within renewal. It takes up the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford raised in terms of Prime Health. I am referring to a contract taken out ahead of Budget day but not coming into force until a few days thereafter. That contract would be honoured for tax relief purposes in the current year, as long as it was consecutive on a contract that was already in place.

I apologise for these complications; I am certainly not trying to trip up the Financial Secretary. We are all anxious to get the legislation as right as we can. We are conscious, too, of Pepper *v.* Hart—hence the need for certainty in the debate.

The third category to which my hon. Friend referred comprised monthly contracts, or as I call them, quasi-annual contracts. Perhaps the Treasury has some sort of administrative concession in mind. I should prefer an administrative concession to nothing at all. There are awkward precedents for extra-statutory concessions—the Revenue allows them from time to time—that are not eventually validated in substantive law later on. Such concessions are an uncomfortable way to relieve a problem: to whom should they be made, will they be extended equally to everyone, and so on? Furthermore, they cannot, by definition, be justiciable. I submit that the last of my hon. Friend's amendments would serve the purpose much better, and I hope that the Financial Secretary will refer to it in due course.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that extra-statutory concession is a far from satisfactory way of dealing with the matter? It would be far fairer to people over 60, many of whom are not especially au fait with complicated tax law, to set down clearly in statute what is involved, thereby allowing their insurance companies to inform them clearly of their position.

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend makes the point better than I could. It is, of course, better to be clear in the statute. If the Government are not inclined to do that, some concession is better than none—but I was going on to mention the importance of how the concession is implemented. How will it be notified to policyholders, many of whom are elderly and who may get confused—although many have a pretty good idea of what is going

[Mr. Boswell]

on? They will need to deal with their insurers, as they already do with the operation of relief at source. But they will need to know how this is to work, the more so if it is delivered by this roundabout route.

The devil is certainly in the detail, and the Government cannot behave as if the detail does not matter. It clearly matters a great deal to policyholders and insurers; and in terms of the smooth operation of revenue law and of fairness as between individuals.

We are still looking for greater clarification. It is the very least the Government can do for people who, even if the transitional arrangements are relaxed or at least clarified, will assuredly suffer in years to come from the principle behind these changes. We continue to oppose it.

Mr. Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I have been provoked to rise by the speech by the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn), who made certain assertions to which I shall return later.

In Committee, certain comments were made about the drafting of the Bill. On other occasions, I have been critical of the style of drafting that we use in this country, but clause 17 could not be a clearer statement of Government policy. As the Financial Secretary said in her letter of 25 July, the Bill's contents, including clause 17, must be interpreted against the background of general law—and the general law is quite clear about when a contract is made. A contract made orally and confirmed later in writing is made at the time of the oral agreement, so this is not a matter of deciding by "regulatory fiat"—the phrase used by the hon. Member for Guildford—nor is the matter very complicated.

I was provoked, as I have said, by some of the extraordinary statements made by the hon. Gentleman. He claimed that 1 million people were involved, but the Conservative spokesman conceded that at most 550,000 people might be affected by the tax relief. On Second Reading, we made the point that that number had hardly increased since the relief was introduced.

The hon. Member for Guildford also made the extraordinary claim that the abolition of this relief, combined with the relief gained from the cut in VAT on domestic fuel from 8 to 5 per cent., was regressive. On Second Reading, I described the extent of fuel poverty in the UK, quoting figures to show that those on lower incomes spend a much higher proportion of those incomes on domestic fuel than do those on higher incomes. So the VAT reduction has had a beneficial, progressive impact.

Help the Aged has commented on the measure, saying that it will affect only 5 per cent. of people over the age of 60:

> "Help the Aged is more concerned about seeing improvements to the NHS so older people will receive high quality, accessible and free health-care."

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Not for the first time, there seems to be some incongruity in the hon. Gentleman's arguments. He is arguing against the amendment, which seeks to protect pensioners with monthly medical health insurance who would otherwise lose the relief immediately. The amendment is designed to allow them a fair phasing out, in line with others who hold annual policies. At the same time, the hon. Gentleman is taking us down the highways and byways of VAT on fuel. On the other hand, proposals elsewhere in the Bill would delay the RPI benefits of a reduction in VAT on fuel until the following year. His colleagues have rather craftily chosen the date of 1 September instead of later in that month. Would the hon. Gentleman care to be consistent?

Mr. Cranston: The Minister will reply specifically to the amendments in a moment. As for rolling monthly contracts—it will be a matter of looking at each contract separately. Is it an indivisible contract, or is it a series of separate contracts?

Mr. Loughton: So that is a no?

Mr. Cranston: I am not sure I even understood the hon. Gentleman's question—

Jacqui Smith: That is because there was none.

Mr. Cranston: Earlier, my hon. Friend dealt very well with the non-regressive intent behind clause 17, combined with the reduction in VAT.

Finally, even the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), on Second Reading, quoted the comments of Mr. William Laing, from the consultants dealing with these matters. He said that this tax relief—the hon. Member for Daventry did not quote the words exactly although he alluded to the report—was ridiculous and could not possibly be justified in terms of savings to the national health service. So all this spilt milk about the impact on the NHS is just so much hot air.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, or perhaps simply subsiding. The reason why I did not quote from Laing is that I quoted from the Economists Advisory Group study, which went into the arguments of Laing and his colleagues very thoroughly and in my view more than adequately exploded them.

Mr. Cranston: I am reminded of the particular point that the hon. Member for Daventry made on Second Reading. The report from the Economists Advisory Group shows that the abolition of the relief would mean at most 30,000 more persons using the NHS. That certainly does not stack up against the figure of 1 million mentioned by the hon. Member for Guildford.

Mr. Clifton-Brown *rose—*

Mr. Cranston: I am about to conclude my remarks.

The amendments are of no worth. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary has already dealt in writing with the points that they raise and will no doubt repeat in a moment what she has already explained.

8.30 pm

Mr. Gibb: The amendment would mitigate some of the crudities in the implementation of a very unjust and vindictive clause. When she winds up the debate, the Financial Secretary will no doubt claim that clause 17 is so important that the Government must dismiss the amendments out of hand. She will no doubt say that the

Opposition have not presented a valid case showing that the tax relief introduced in 1990 increased the number of people over the age of 60 who took out medical insurance. She will say that, as a consequence, the Government have every right to ride roughshod over the House and to abolish the relief with no subtle amendments being accepted because the Government know best on this issue, as on everything else.

Jacqui Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is not just the Government who know best? In 1991, the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Mr. William Waldegrave—who, sadly, is no longer with us—admitted that the relief on private medical insurance had not worked very well, was expensive to administer, and had not been taken up very widely.

Mr. Gibb: Although there was a lack of take-up among people in the higher tax brackets, which is why in due course the relief was removed from them, there has been an enormous take-up among people over 60 in the basic rate tax bracket. I will give some figures in a moment.

Mr. Loughton: What we heard from the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) is just another outrageous version of short termism. The tax relief was introduced only in April 1990 and had hardly had a chance to get going.

Mr. Gibb: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention.

Figures show that in 1990 some 400,000 individuals over the age of 60 then had private medical insurance. By last year, the number had increased to 600,000—an increase of 50 per cent. The Financial Secretary will therefore be wrong if she claims that the amendment cannot be accepted because the Opposition have provided no proof that the relief had any effect. During that period, there was no overall increase in the number of people of all ages taking out private medical insurance, which proves incontrovertibly that the relief enabled more people over the age of 60 to take out private medical insurance.

Let us deal now with the issue of cost. The hon. Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston) claimed that Age Concern is more interested in improvements in the health service than in giving tax relief to the mere 5 per cent. of the population who have private medical insurance, but how will abolishing the relief have any positive effect on resourcing the NHS? If anything, it will have a devastatingly negative effect on resourcing the NHS as the Government push more people into dependency on the NHS.

According to the Red Book, abolition of this tax relief will raise £115 million. Grossed up, that figure corresponds to premiums of £500 million. If one assumes a claims-to-premium ratio of 80, as the industry does, it corresponds to £400 million of treatment costs. If one assumes, again as the industry does—and this is a conservative assumption—that if only one in three people give up their health insurance as a result of clause 17, that corresponds to £133 million-worth of medical treatment. Some people put the figure much higher, as my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford does on the basis of information that he has received.

Even if we take out of those figures the hotel costs that private medical insurance covers—they are not regarded by the industry as particularly significant—there is at best only a break-even position between what the Government will save and what they will have to spend in providing health treatment for the people who have given up their private medical insurance.

It is worse than that, however, because there is also a domino effect. As prices are increased generally for health insurance for the over-60s, more people will abandon that insurance, which in turn means that there will be fewer people to carry the burden of the risk, shoulder the costs and cross-subsidise one another. Even without the tax relief, prices will have to rise, which again means that even more people will have to leave their private medical insurance schemes.

That tallies with letters that I have received from my constituents. In my constituency, 36.6 per cent. of the population are retired and a large proportion of them have private medical insurance. They have written to me in great numbers expressing concern about the proposed abolition of private medical insurance relief. It is absurd that the Government should be introducing such a measure at a time when we are concerned about an ever-aging population and when there are increasing demands on the NHS. It is a cruel and vindictive policy.

Liz Blackman: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why the proposal is so vindictive when the majority of taxpayers are paying twice—once for the NHS care that the majority receive and again for a relief that benefits the few?

Mr. Gibb: It is a tax break. It is the people who take out this insurance who are paying twice—once through their own taxes, although they rarely take up any benefit from that through the NHS, and again through their private medical insurance, which is what will cover their health care as and when they need it. The figures show that the proposal is vindictive. The Government are focusing the policy on a minority who have taken the trouble to pay twice.

Let us consider the figures: 28 per cent. of all hip operations take place in the private sector, 20 per cent. of all heart conditions are treated in the private sector and 20 per cent. of all acute conditions are dealt with in the private sector. Yet the Government want to damage the private sector. That is what I mean when I say that the proposal is vindictive. It will mean that fewer people have the opportunity to have hip operations or to have their heart conditions and acute conditions treated.

Liz Blackman: The hon. Gentleman's notion of choice and opportunity is a little skewed. The majority of taxpayers pay once to avail themselves of NHS treatment, and again through their tax contributions, part of which go towards private medical insurance relief. The point is that the majority of people do not have that choice: only the few who can afford private medical insurance—which is topped up by the many—have that choice.

Mr. Gibb: The hon. Lady needs a lesson in mathematics, because tax relief on those premiums is worth only 20 per cent., whereas the claims-to-premium ratio is 80. Tax relief is therefore a fraction of the health care costs spent on people with private insurance who make claims to cover their treatment.

[Mr. Gibb]

All that will happen if the relief is abolished and people leave the private sector and use the health service is that an enormous deficit will be created. The only reason why the NHS will break even rather than have a huge deficit under the policy is that two out of three people will grin and bear it and pay more. But for that fact, the policy would have a devastating impact on the NHS. The policy will not do the health service any good, however, and it will lead to a further stretching of resources. The policy is vindictive.

Only 10 per cent. of the population have taken out health insurance; yet the figures show that 28 per cent. of all hip operations and 20 per cent. of all heart operations are conducted in the private sector. As our population is growing ever older, why have the Government decided now to abolish the relief? The hon. Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman) spoke of extending choice and opportunity, but how have the Government extended choice and opportunity for people to take out private health insurance by making it more expensive?

The previous Labour Government abolished grant-aided schools, and how did their action increase choice and opportunity for people on low incomes to send their children to public and private schools? The policy resulted in more exclusive education and provided fewer opportunities for middle and lower-income people. Abolition of private health insurance relief will have the same effect. The policy demonstrates the same old vindictive Labour politics of envy and will achieve nothing, saving no money and placing a bigger and unsustainable burden on the NHS.

If relief were left in place, ever more pensioners would take out private medical insurance. There is no reason to believe that the trend from 1989 to 1996 of those taking out private medical insurance would not have continued, helping more people to receive more treatments in the private sector and relieving more of the burden on the NHS. That would allow more people who are dependent on the NHS to enjoy shorter waiting lists and to receive more treatments.

The Government should accept our amendment, because it would mitigate at least some of the problems caused by the policy. The Government should also take a less high-handed and arrogant stance. Most importantly, the Government should stop reverting to their old-Labour type by abolishing a greatly needed tax relief.

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) described himself as "modest and diffident" in discussing amendment No. 1. To be fair, he attempted to discuss the minutiae of the amendment. The gaff was blown, however, by the hon. Members for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) and for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb), who made it quite clear that the intention of their group of amendments is not to deal with small anomalies but to have another go at the principle of removing relief on private medical insurance.

Today, we have debated the principle of removing relief in greater detail than we did in the debate on Second Reading, in which I and several other hon. Members in the Chamber spoke. In this debate, Conservative Members have gone so far as to suggest that people who take out private health insurance are not so much exercising freedom of choice in the market as performing an altruistic function—helping the rest of us to get more out of the health service by spending their money on what they think is better service in the private sector. Such an assertion is ridiculous. Moreover, as I said in the previous debate, for Opposition Members to believe that the NHS can operate effectively only if people are bribed to leave it and to take out private medical insurance is an indictment of their views.

Mr. Flight: If 600,000 people simply left the private sector and received treatment in the state health sector, a massive increase in NHS funding would be necessary and taxes would have to be raised. The very crude point is that people, to the extent that they take out private insurance, are saving the NHS a major bill.

8.45 pm

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman's point is extremely crude, and it was dealt with on Second Reading when we said that, despite the introduction of relief on private medical insurance, there was no significant increase in the number of people over 60 taking out private medical insurance. Conversely, therefore, removing the relief—in order to use that money for something much more worthy—will not result in a flood of people returning to the NHS. The hon. Gentleman not only made a crude point: he was inaccurate in the facts.

Conservative Members have made it clear that they are concerned only about the principle of relief on private medical insurance. As we said in the previous debate, trying to persuade people to take out private health insurance is not the way in which to defend the NHS—if that is what Conservative Members are interested in, although I doubt whether it is. Even if that were the best way of defending the NHS, the relief that we are debating has not proved to be particularly effective. As I said before, even William Waldegrave, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in 1991, admitted that the relief was not especially effective. As Labour Members have said, and as the previous Government admitted, the relief was not effective because the Conservative Government removed it at the higher rate. The relief, therefore, is not only unjust but it does not work.

Conservative Members should be honest. They are not concerned about the minutiae of the amendment.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): The hon. Lady persists in mentioning that William Waldegrave was Chief Secretary to the Treasury in 1991. He was not Chief Secretary in 1991. That throws some doubt on her argument, which she is basing on something that is not true.

Jacqui Smith: If he was not Chief Secretary, I apologise. Nevertheless, the Conservative Government's reduction at the top rate gives credence to the belief that they did not think that the relief was working.

The basic point is that the group of amendments are not about the minutiae that the hon. Member for Daventry—but no other Conservative Members—

mentioned. To be fair, in Committee Conservative Members often raised very boring, but legitimate, points on the minutiae of the Bill.

Mr. Woodward: I am struck by the hon. Lady's comments. I should like to ask her to clarify one matter for Conservative Members. Is she saying that she is against private medicine in principle—yes or no?

Jacqui Smith: At no point have I said that I am against private medicine. I said—I will repeat it for the hon. Gentleman, almost word for word—that if people choose to go into the private market to buy private medical insurance for themselves, that would be fine by me, but I do not believe that it is right—

Mr. Woodward: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Jacqui Smith: No.

It is not right that the vast majority of taxpayers should fund the private decisions of a few people to buy private medical insurance, because the money could be used in better ways. The money saved could be used in a progressive, not regressive, manner by funding the reduction in VAT on fuel—which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston) pointed out, the hon. Member for Guildford said is not regressive.

As we said on Second Reading, we have a clear choice: we can allow the many to subsidise the few in their private decision on private medical insurance, or we can use that money to reduce VAT bills for the many. The Government have made the choice, and Opposition Members will not get very far by haggling over the minutiae of the Bill as a cover for disagreeing with its principle.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) who made a speech from good old Labour, which opposes choice in the health service or any of our other great public services. Old Labour would really like to abolish all private medical facilities.

I would chastise my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) as his amendment does not go nearly far enough. I would have tabled an amendment to extend tax relief for at least another 10 years—then we would have been getting somewhere. The acid test is whether the clause benefits the national health service. Patently, the national health service will suffer as a result of its implementation.

I wonder whether Labour Members remember that one of the pledges on which they fought the general election was that to reduce NHS waiting lists by 100,000 people. Does the clause do anything to meet that pledge? No; it almost certainly makes it much more difficult to achieve.

Mr. Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman give us an assurance that, this time, he will stay to listen to the answers to his questions? Some of us were a bit shocked that in an earlier debate he made a strong point but did not bother to remain in the Chamber to hear the answer.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: That is a petty point from the hon. Gentleman, who has attended hardly any of the Budget debates. He pops in to make silly interventions and then pops out again. That cannot be a sensible way to proceed.

Mr. Woodward: Had my hon. Friend remained in the Chamber, he would have discovered that a number of questions that had been put to the Financial Secretary, not least about whether the Government intend to scrap MIRAS next May—although that is now absolutely clear—were not answered. Had my hon. Friend been able to stay in the Chamber, he would have had rather an unsatisfactory time.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for enlightening me. Perhaps that was a good reason not to remain in the Chamber—I did not expect to get any answers—but I should be most grateful if the Financial Secretary would give me one positive answer this evening. We know how much money the measure will raise, as the figure is in the Red Book. I should like to know what the net costs to the health service will be.

We know that 13p in every pound paid out by PPP goes to the national health service. That amounts to about £220,000 a day or some £55 million a year. According to my local NHS trust, when private patients are treated in the national health service the marginal cost to the trust is about 20 per cent. That means that PPP alone is giving the national health service a profit of £11 million a year. Taking into account BUPA and all the other private health care providers, I suspect that the figure will equal, if not exceed, the £135 million that the measure will raise.

What on earth is the point of introducing a Budget measure that will cost the country and the national health service money? It is political dogma and hypocrisy at its absolute worst. It is absolute nonsense.

We have already heard from my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) that 80 per cent. of medical insurance premiums are paid out in treatment costs. The private sector now treats 28 per cent. of all hip operations, 20 per cent. of all heart conditions and 20 per cent. of all acute conditions. It also treats a huge and increasing range of other ailments and conditions.

As people are living longer and are more affluent, perhaps we should give them a little more encouragement to use the private sector. The people who will be affected by the changes are those at the margins; it will not be right hon. and hon. Members who will retire on a parliamentary pension, but those who, throughout their lives, have saved a little bit of occupational or personal pension who will either trade down their policies and buy less expensive and less extensive cover so that when something serious goes wrong such as a heart condition they will be forced back to the national health service, or cease taking out a policy. That is much more serious for the country as, come what may, those people will be forced back to the national health service. When people are living longer and the previous Government introduced measures to encourage people to take out private pensions, it seems perverse to proceed with this policy.

There will be another serious effect on all private medical policies. As the numbers involved drop, the administration costs for those who are left will rise. When premiums rise because of the withdrawal of tax relief and

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the increased administrative costs, even more people will drop out of the private sector and the national health service will be further disadvantaged.

I urge the Government to think carefully about the policy. It will hit a number of people at the margin, as has the reduction in MIRAS and the measures that affect savings accounts. All those measures will affect the middle classes—precisely the people who elected Labour to office. If the Government have any listening ear—which I doubt—I urge them to consider the measure very carefully.

Mr. Geraint Davies: We have heard a lot of hot air about the aims and objectives of the amendments in terms of clarity, fairness and helping the national health service. In my view, they represent a cynical attempt to frustrate the Government's efforts to bring about a fairer and more equitable system through the Budget measures relating to the health service and VAT on fuel.

The facts are clear and simple. We are all aware of the distorted industry views that the Opposition have obtained from various lobbyists with vested interests. The Inland Revenue has published figures that the Opposition have failed to read or to recognise. Between 1990 and 1997, the number of private medical contracts increased from 350,000 to 375,000—an increase of less than 10 per cent.—and the number of people involved rose from 500,000 to 550,000. At the time, the Opposition, then in government, were doing everything they could to make the distribution of power and wealth less equitable, so it is surprising that the number of people using the private sector increased by only 10 per cent. It is clear from the statistics that the demand for private medicine is not elastic at the margins and that the saving that the Government make as a result of the Budget measures will not result in a mass exodus from the private sector. That is rubbish.

Mr. Gibb: If the hon. Gentleman insists on quoting those figures, should he not also quote the overall figures for people of all ages who had private health insurance in the period he mentioned? I suspect that those figures would show a fall in the overall number taking out health insurance, demonstrating that the relief has encouraged those over 60 to take out private health insurance.

Mr. Davies: I think that the overall figure has grown. The relief pays public money to people to do something that they would do anyway. They are quite capable of paying for the services and will continue to do so. It is a regressive relief, in sharp contrast to our stance on VAT on fuel. The reduction in VAT on fuel will help health, because fewer old people will die of hypothermia and cold-related diseases. That is a good investment in public health.

I suspect that the Opposition really want a two-tier NHS in which some people are drained out to the private sector by bribing them with public money. That would undermine the universal stakeholding of the NHS and result in the atomised society that Lady Thatcher often spoke about. It would create an American-style system that costs more overall and leaves a large section of society with no health cover. That is their real agenda, but the British people saw through it. That is why we have a Labour Government and why we shall make these changes.

9 pm

Mr. Woodward: We have heard much from the hon. Members for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) and for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies) about principles. Principles matter a great deal. The hon. Member for Croydon, Central has made much of the importance of vested interests. He referred to the possible vested interests of my hon. Friends. I do not know what their vested interests may be, but my view is straightforward. When debating a health policy, we should always ask whether it will help the patient.

We are all aware that the national health service will consume as much money as can be put its way. There is nothing wrong with that. When resources allow, we should make more money available to the NHS to make more patients better. I am sure that nobody disagrees with that.

Labour Members have not addressed whether the clause will help patients. The NHS still has lengthy waiting lists. We hope to reduce waiting times, but the reality is that waiting lists exist. I do not approach these issues ideologically. In all cases, I apply the acid test. Will the clause help more patients to be treated more effectively and more quickly?

The clause is the application of old-fashioned Labour ideology. We heard from the hon. Member for Redditch a gross dislike of the principle of private medicine. She suggested that the measure was a way of clearing up tax distortions to create a fairer medical system. Is it fair if the measure leads to an individual having to wait even an hour longer?

Labour Members pooh-poohed private medical companies' suggestions that the measure will lead to people withdrawing from private medical insurance policies. It almost certainly will. Labour Members have made much of the suggestion that the changes in relief led to an increase of only 10 per cent. in take-up. Even if we apply the same standard and assume a decline of only 10 per cent. in the number taking up private medical policies, the money will still have to be found to fund those people.

Where will the money come from? We all accept that NHS waiting lists are too long. In their manifesto and in election speeches throughout the country, Labour Members made much of the importance of reducing waiting lists yet, as sure as the sun will rise tomorrow morning, their policy will mean that waiting lists have to increase. They will increase because some people will decide that this measure is the straw that breaks the camel's back—the moment when, due to the loss of relief, they can no longer afford to continue the policy.

Liz Blackman: Several of my hon. Friends have made the point that the amendments are merely a smokescreen—and not a very good one—to hide Opposition Members' total opposition to the Government's policy. The hon. Gentleman is merely illustrating that point. I do not think that he has once touched on the amendments.

Mr. Woodward: The hon. Lady—if she would be kind enough to listen to the answer that she sought—is much concerned suddenly with not discussing the principle. She has suddenly been faced with the reality. She must realise that the statement is effectively, "No, we shall not in any way encourage private medicine." In the name of distortion removing, it is possible to remove tax relief from those who would seek to spend their money—and exercise their choice and freedom—on enhancing their medical coverage.

Elsewhere in the Budget, however, the Government will provide as many tax reliefs as they like, such as in the film business. There is an obvious contradiction in the Government's policy. When it comes to pleasing their own particular sector, they are more than happy to provide any tax relief that is requested, but when it comes to looking after patients, due to their ideological principles, bang: down comes the scythe and they will not help people who wish to help themselves.

The kernel is that the Labour party still believes in good old-fashioned Labour envy. It wants to remove the opportunities of those who have saved and remove the opportunities that come from freedom and choice. We see that in the way the Government will sponsor tax relief on films but remove it from those who wish to make proper provision for themselves in their old age.

Mr. Swayne: May I point out to Labour Members that it is precisely because we are so wholly opposed to the principle of the measure that we are attempting to secure, on the basis of the amendments, some narrow relief for the categories that have been described?

I draw to the House's attention the extraordinary topsy-turvy world in which Labour Members appear to live. It has been suggested by a number of them that those who benefit from the relief are somehow getting something unfairly in comparison with other taxpayers. The word "subsidised" was used. The reality is the opposite. It is very simple, but I shall explain it for the benefit of Labour Members.

Someone who is over 60 years old and therefore benefiting from this relief would, having paid their taxes throughout their life, be entitled to NHS health care. Indeed, even if they had not paid those taxes they would still be entitled to NHS health care. Should they find that they need, for example, a hip replacement operation, they would be entitled to apply to the NHS for the operation.

However, this person applies instead to their insurance company and has a private health care operation. The Exchequer and the NHS therefore benefit from the fact that, although a person was entitled to make a claim and therefore incur a charge against the NHS, they have not done so, preferring to take advantage of payments that they have made throughout their life—certainly in the latter part of their life. Far from being smitten by a bill, the taxpayer has enjoyed a relief. In fact, with tax relief at 20 per cent., the general taxpayer has had something of a bargain.

Dawn Primarolo: Follow that! I decided, before today's debate, to consult the book written by Nigel Lawson, now Lord Lawson, called "The View from No. 11", because I thought that he might have something to say about the introduction of relief for private medical insurance. He does, and very interesting reading it makes. On pages 616 to 617, he describes his opposition to the implementation of private medical insurance relief for the over-60s. He says that he was forced to introduce it by the then Prime Minister and that

> "I duly introduced it, trying to conceal my embarrassment, in my 1989 Budget."

Clearly, that embarrassment continues this evening as Conservative Members seek to defend a relief which, even when it was introduced, their own party seriously questioned—Conservatives questioned whether it was right to give a subsidy to people who had already decided to take out private medical insurance.

Mr. Clifton-Brown *rose—*

Dawn Primarolo: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can tell me why taxpayers' money should be used to subsidise activities in which individuals had already decided to engage.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: As the Financial Secretary has read the excellent book by Lord Lawson so carefully, can she tell the House of any other lessons that she has learnt from it, which she intends to implement in future Budgets?

Dawn Primarolo: None of that relates to this clause. To put the record straight, when the relief was introduced in 1990 by the Conservative Government, there were 350,000 contracts for private medical insurance in this category, covering some 500,000 people. There are now only 375,000 contracts, covering at most 550,000 people, and that clearly shows that the relief has subsidised action that people had already decided to take. Clause 17 has nothing to do with choice or forcing people to use the national health service. It is a question of how taxpayers' money is used to benefit the majority, not a tiny minority. This Government have already given £1.2 billion extra to the national health service, so we will take no lessons from Opposition Members about investment in it.

The hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) first raised the question of contracts during our debate in the Committee of the whole House. I am not a lawyer, but I understand that a contract arises when an offer is made and accepted. Had the notes on clauses meant written contracts only, they would have said so. I did not seek to mislead the hon. Gentleman about verbal contracts. He raised the fear that companies that operate through telephone sales will lose out. I think—I shall say this very delicately, in case I affront the hon. Gentleman—that that fear springs from a fundamental misunderstanding of the terms of clause 17. The clause is silent on verbal contracts. If an eligible medical insurance contract has been entered into before 2 July, it will attract relief until it expires. That is verbal and written.

I had no intention of misleading the hon. Gentleman; I simply assumed that he interpreted "contracts" in the same way as I do. This is not a matter for the Inland Revenue, but a matter of contract law. I cannot debate the niceties of contract law with the hon. Gentleman, because, as I said, I am not a lawyer, but that is the advice that I was given by the Revenue, and that was my understanding when I gave the hon. Gentleman the answer that I gave him in the previous debate.

Mr. Boswell *rose—*

Dawn Primarolo: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to intervene?

Mr. Boswell: I was only going to say, "So far, so good."

Dawn Primarolo: That is a relief, although not one that costs a great deal of money.

9.15 pm

The next issue that was raised related to contracts made before 2 July, but commencing after that date. An insurance contract can be written so that the period covered does not commence on the date on which the contract is legally entered into, but commences at some date in the future. Opposition Members referred to that. Clause 17 would not stop such contracts attracting tax relief, unless an insurance company tried to be too clever by half and entered into a contract before that date. The contract would then cover a period longer than a year, but it would not qualify for relief.

Mr. St. Aubyn: The Financial Secretary is being very helpful. Will she make it absolutely clear, however, that if a contract renewal was agreed before that cut-off date of 2 July, but the natural period for renewal was a 12-month period beginning shortly after 2 July, the renewal would nevertheless attract relief for the full period?

Dawn Primarolo: No, it would not attract relief for the whole period, because it would now be for a longer period than the 12 months. There would have been a false start, in that there would have been an attempt to sign a contract before 2 July, when the starting period was well after that date.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I beg to differ in regard to the interpretation that can be put on the hon. Lady's letter to me. In the normal course of business, some insurance companies—including one in my constituency, which told me about this—send out renewal contracts before the renewal date, and receive confirmation of renewal before that date. Those companies will, therefore, have received confirmation of renewal before 2 July, for a regular 12-month period that starts shortly after 2 July. I should have thought that, given that a genuine contract had been made for a regular 12-month period, it would be reasonable to expect such a contract to be given the normal relief.

Dawn Primarolo: No, because the contract period starts after that date. The relief—and, following that, the transition—relates to contracts made before 2 July.

May I now deal with what the hon. Gentleman said about monthly contracts?

Mr. St. Aubyn *rose—*

Dawn Primarolo: May I just make this point?

The hon. Gentleman asked when a contract was a monthly contract and when it was not, and how the Inland Revenue interpreted the position. The Revenue has had discussions with a number of insurance companies, and with the Association of British Insurers. They have made it clear that they consider the overwhelming majority of these so-called monthly contracts to be annual and, therefore, caught within the relief as it is proposed. It is possible, however, that there are 3,000 or 4,000 truly monthly contracts. The relief applies only for the period of the contract—the month—because that is the trigger.

The point that the hon. Member for Guildford raised in connection with the company in his constituency is now well understood. This is not a concession from the Inland Revenue. It is how normal business is done with regard to those contracts. That information about the present situation has been made clear to the ABI and a number of other organisations.

Mr. St. Aubyn: The hon. Lady said in her letter to me:

> "the relief is withdrawn . . . in respect of all contracts made on or after Budget day. Contracts made before then are not affected."

It seems from that statement and from my careful reading of it in conjunction with the Bill that, if a contract is genuinely entered into before 2 July, but the start date—for normal commercial reasons—is slightly after, it will be recognised. After all, it was made before the critical date of the Budget, without any cognisance of what the Budget might contain. It would seem unfair for people who have committed themselves to making payments with the benefit of the tax relief to find on Budget day that the contract was suddenly superseded.

In the debate on 16 July, the hon. Lady may recall that I made an analogy with contracts for the exchange of property, in which case if the contract is exchanged before Budget day but completion happens afterwards, the old rate of duty applies. That is accepted on all sides. This is an analogous case. Perhaps the hon. Lady would like to answer that point.

Dawn Primarolo: The renewal itself does not necessarily make a contract. This a grey area. If the policyholder agrees, that is okay, but it is not the normal course of events. A renewal is sent out and then the person concerned agrees it. That is not covered, and I think that that is the point the hon. Gentleman is making.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to the hon. Lady and I realise that she is doing her best and attending to these matters in detail. May I check on that last point? If she is saying that the renewal is not by itself a contract because the contract does not come into force until after the operative date, can the policyholder—the person who has taken out the new policy or the renewal—rescind that policy, given the change in circumstances? This is a critical issue. If people are trapped in contracts on one assumption and cannot fulfil them because of a change in the tax relief, it is particularly inequitable.

Dawn Primarolo: That is the concept of a binding contract—an offer made and an acceptance. If a contract is made before, even if it starts after, 2 July, that is covered by clause 17. I was genuinely trying to explain that that is not an absolute, blanket rule. If the period of one year, which is the maximum for which relief is provided under the clause, is exceeded, all cases will not be covered. It is a combination—the contract and the 12-month period.

I genuinely believe that the Government have been extremely generous in providing for transitional relief and the fair phasing out of the relief for those people, the overwhelming majority of whom have, until now, been receiving a relief—a subsidy—for action that they would otherwise still have taken. All the forecasts and the predictions about the likely impact—how many people will give up their insurance—are exactly that: predictions from the very industry that is seeking the preserve the relief, or subsidy, to the few. The Armageddon painted by Conservative Members simply does not bear scrutiny. The hon. Member for St. Albans—

Mr. St. Aubyn: Guildford.

Dawn Primarolo: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon—it has been a long day. The hon. Member for Guildford made his opening remarks on the basis, first, that I misled the House about contracts, and I have demonstrated to him that I did not; and secondly, that I said about the impact of the removal that there was no indication at the present time that people would cancel their insurance, and I stand by that claim. Already insurance companies are doing their best to ensure that they keep the business that they had before the relief and during the relief, and I have no doubt that they will maintain it after the relief is removed.

The measure is fair, removing a privileged position from the few and ensuring that the resources are spent for the benefit of the many. I sincerely hope that the House will accept—

Mr. Loughton: Will the Financial Secretary give way?

Dawn Primarolo: I have already taken lots of interventions.

I sincerely hope that the House will now accept that the proposals in the clause are fair, equitable and just to those who currently have a benefit that they should not have; and that they will enable those people to adjust to changes made to ensure that resources can be used instead for the benefit of the many and of the national health service.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for having allowed, in the debate on amendment No. 1, a much wider debate on clause 17. As a result of that wider debate, it must have been realised by hon. Members on both sides of the House that there is a real difference of opinion about the effect of the clause, not only on those who take out health insurance, but on the availability of the health service to all members of our society.

The numbers involved have been a matter of dispute. Indeed, the hon. Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston) questioned my competence when I was merely quoting an authoritative study from the Economists Advisory Group. The study clearly showed that where a tax relief is costed by the Revenue at £120 million rising to £140 million over the next few years, the amount of tax relief is 23p in the pound and the typical insurance cost is less than £700, it is easy to see how nearly 1 million people will be affected, either directly or indirectly, by the abolition of the relief. Those are the advisory group's figures, not mine; I know that other industry estimates quote smaller numbers.

Mr. Cranston: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. St. Aubyn: No—there is so little time.

There is a wide range of estimates, but they all come up with big figures for those affected—upwards of half a million people and perhaps as many as 1 million. We can also be quite sure that there will therefore be a knock-on cost, which will be measured in tens of thousands, if not more, as a result of the withdrawal of the relief.

Mr. Gibb: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. St. Aubyn: Yes, I will give way to my hon. Friend.

Hon. Members: There is no time to give way.

Mr. Gibb: I just want to make an important point about the figures that the Inland Revenue has supplied to the Financial Secretary. Given that this is a relief applied at source, is it not the case that there tend to be inaccuracies in the Inland Revenue figures, because there is no necessity for such figures to be reported to it? The figures relating to MIRAS from the Inland Revenue are similarly inaccurate.

Mr. St. Aubyn: That point is well made. The figures involved are speculative. The most speculative part of the project is the theory that there will be no cancellations of policies and no oncost to the health service.

Mr. Geraint Davies *rose*—

Mr. St. Aubyn: I will deal with the points made by the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies) later.

The hon. Member for Dudley, North has said that this is a matter of general law, which need not trouble the House. The whole point of our argument has been summed up in the words of the Financial Secretary, who said that there are grey areas in the law. That is why we sought clarification. When we found that there was no such clarification in the clause or in the explanatory notes from the Inland Revenue, we felt let down, at the very least.

9.30 pm

The hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) said that we regard the effect of the clause and the lifting of VAT on fuel as regressive, while she tried to argue that it was progressive. They say progressive, we say regressive, let's call the whole thing off. If they will not call the whole thing off, they should at least implement it fairly and squarely.

In that respect, I thank the Financial Secretary for offering clarification on the matters about which we have diligently sought it. We have done so, not because we feel that we should instantly understand such matters—and if we do not, no one else will—but because major companies in the industry, including one that happens to be in my constituency, were genuinely concerned. They felt, according to the hon. Lady's words, that there were genuinely grey areas in the law. They were concerned that they could promote health insurance policies to their customers with the benefit of tax relief, only for those customers to find later in the year, when their tax inspector looked at their returns, that that relief was to be disallowed.

What the Financial Secretary has said has clarified the issue greatly, but I am still concerned about her approach to monthly contracts. The information from the insurance provider in my constituency reveals that if the rules on monthly contracts are not interpreted in the most

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favourable way, upwards of 20,000-odd contracts which it has outstanding will be immediately affected. I note that the Financial Secretary shakes her head. I listened carefully to what she said about monthly contracts; she has assured us that no more than a few thousand at the very most might be inadvertently affected by the way in which the relief is phased out.

The hon. Lady quoted Lord Lawson. It is always a pleasure to hear Labour Members quoting eminent Conservatives, but it is always disappointing that they are so selective in their quotations. I remember from the same book that one of its clarion calls was for clarity in tax legislation. That is what is lacking from clause 17. I fear that the hon. Lady has not read the entire book, but she appears to have gained the spirit from Lord Lawson that such clarity is needed in the clause.

As a result of the process, we are grateful for achieving a measure of clarity. On that basis, I do not believe that it is necessary to put the amendment to a formal vote.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 49

STAMP DUTY ON CONVEYANCE OR TRANSFER ON SALE

Mr. Boswell: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 47, line 32, after first 'of', insert

'£1 for every £100 or part of £100 of the consideration up to £250,000, and at the rate of'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 8, line 33, after 'consideration;', insert 'in excess of £250,000'.

No. 9, line 34, after 'case', insert—

'(i) the rate of £1 for every £100 or part of £100 of the consideration up to £250,000,

(ii) the rate of £1.50 for every £100 or part of £100 of the consideration over £250,000 but below £500,000, and

(iii)'.

No. 10, line 35, after 'consideration', insert 'over £500,000'.

Mr. Boswell: We come now to stamp duty. For a Tory, there is a certain nostalgic affection for a tax introduced 303 years ago, which has been doing its business for the nation ever since with comparatively little fuss and very little scrutiny in this place. There is a certain nostalgia about a tax whose head legislation is the Stamp Duty Act 1891, updated, of course, by electronic systems for data, especially in relation to securities, and the stamp duty reserve tax—also, I believe, introduced by Lord Lawson—which will raise, according to Government proposals, more than £3 billion in the current year, and which, significantly, was last increased in 1974. I wonder which party was in power when stamp duty was last increased.

By way of introduction, I have a short piece of advice for the Financial Secretary. When the Bill is out of the way, perhaps she will spare a little time to go down to Bush house and see the Stamp Office in operation. I had occasion to do so, on re-registering some of my children's securities. There are not many of those securities, but when the children reached the age of 18 the securities needed to be upgraded by a 50p stamp to put them in their own name. It was money well spent to see the people marking and stamping those documents. I am not sure that it raised much revenue, but it certainly is an interesting place to visit.

I now come to the substance of our amendments, and of the important changes—so far undiscussed because of the guillotine—that the Government propose. Before the Budget, my attention was drawn to a positive flurry of three economic reports, which were submitted to the Chancellor and may have modestly influenced his thinking for the better. There were Miller and Scott on residential property, Barber and White on commercial property, and the Centre for Economics and Business Research on the overall economic impact. Collectively, they may have stopped in their tracks the slightly sillier ideas that the Government had to increase stamp duty to 6 or 7 per cent. If they did so, I am very pleased.

A strange set of proposals for stamp duty has emerged, however. First, there is very little impact indeed on the residential property market. It seems likely that this proposal will affect 30,000 residential properties in a full year—between 1 and 1.5 per cent. of the residential property market, amounting to a full year yield of about £130 million. Arguably, therefore, the average cost per dwelling of those affected is about £4,000, which is a small impact on a small proportion of residential properties, by definition exceeding £250,000 in value.

Interestingly, today's press reports make it clear that among those who pay the tax will be the Prime Minister, who has recently disposed of his property for rather more than £600,000, and will therefore pay £6,000 extra—but he need not worry too much because he has trousered a capital gain in excess of £200,000 on it anyway, and there is no windfall tax on those capital gains.

At any rate, the Government cannot seriously argue that this set of proposals has a significant impact on the prices of residential property. If there were a boom, if there were over-heating—the evidence for that remains questionable—it would still represent a peashooter approach to tackling it.

On the other hand, the true effect is felt in the commercial property sector. Interestingly, according to the Government's figures, three quarters of the revenue of stamp duty in the property sector is raised on residential property, but three quarters of the increase will affect the commercial property sector—one quarter of the market. Some 20,000 such properties will be affected annually.

This is, therefore, yet another hit on business, and it is entirely consistent with the approach adopted by the Government elsewhere in the Budget. It is the sort of measure which gives rise to the International Monetary Fund saying, in a report which Labour Members have cited as positive for them, that something will have to be done about consumer spending elsewhere because the Government have not had the courage to tackle it now. That is a judgment which the Government need to take.

Estimates in the surveys to which I referred are that, as pension funds and insurance companies own some £60 billion of commercial property in this country, stamp duty is likely to affect the valuation of their funds by an estimated £300 million alone on pension funds and a larger sum on insurance funds. It would therefore chime in nicely with the changes in advance corporation tax, which have seriously damaged those interests in the Budget. It is yet another indirect hit on the citizen through the medium of business. For that reason, if for no other, we criticise it severely and will oppose it tonight.

My next point may be smaller, but is, none the less, significant. In their anxiety to shield the residential property sector, the Government have put a burden not merely on the commercial sector and real property but on other kinds of property transfer by document. For example, the Institute of Directors pointed out that stamp duty covers transfers of good will, intellectual property, of which I have some knowledge, and so forth. At any rate, the Financial Secretary may care to offer a figure for the breakdown of the impact between commercial property and the other kinds of property swept up by the clause.

Our main concern and the substance of the amendments is the structure of the duty. It is interesting that the bulk of stamp duty is still raised from marketable securities, which attract—in current circumstances it is reasonable that they should continue to attract—a separate 0.5 per cent. rate of duty. Indeed, if the rate were to rise any higher, it would severely damage London's competitiveness as a financial centre.

May I return to real property, which is the subject of the amendments? We now have an extraordinary situation. Under the old arrangements applicable until the Budget, there was a zero rate for properties under £60,000 and one positive rate of 1 per cent. thereafter. We now have an unchanged zero rate, but three positive rates: 1 per cent. for properties up to £250,000; 1.5 per cent. for properties worth between £250,000 and £500,000; and 2 per cent. for properties worth more than that, which applied to the Prime Minister.

I admit that ever since the 1960s when I first became involved in taxation policy, I have always disliked the way in which the stamp duty system operates. It operates on a "slab" rather than a "slice" system. Tax is charged up to a certain threshold, and the rate is then increased for the whole of the charge thereafter—not for the first tranche with a different rate for the next tranche, but right through on the whole amount. That gives rise to some unsatisfactory effects. It may be another byproduct of the Government's haste in introducing their legislation this summer that they have been unable to redesign the system and come up with a smoother progression.

My objections to the slab system are that, given that the rates are very small—1 to 2 per cent.—there is little progressivity within the slabs. Whatever the figures are between £60,000 and £250,000, whether the house is comparatively small or large, the charge is the same.

9.45 pm

Given a low rate of, say, 1.5 per cent., the change in value between—I choose two arbitrary figures—a house of £275,000 and one of £276,000 would be £15 extra tax. That is hardly a material difference. The case is, however, entirely different at the margin, which is the substance of the amendments.

If one moves across the margin into a new tax rate, it triggers the higher rate throughout the whole cost. The Institute of Directors, for example, pointed out that a move in value from £250,000 to £251,000 would move up the duty from £2,500 to £3,765. That is an extra tax not of £15 on exactly the same step as in the example that I quoted for a property of higher value, but of £1,265 on an increase in value of £1,000. That is a marginal rate of 126.5 per cent., by my calculation.

If the property were on offer and the contract was made at £250,001, almost exactly the same tax hike would take effect, but the marginal rate would reach the stratosphere.

In practice, of course—this is a bad sign for tax propriety—vendors, purchasers and their professional advisers will move heaven and earth at the marginal points to try to prevent the situation arising. All manner of deals will be done with the furniture or excluding the light bulbs to bring the value below the magic threshold. That is a bad way of conducting taxation.

The Institute of Directors proposes a slice system. Although it is silent on the first £60,000, which is of course tax free at present, the taxable rate, as I understand the proposal, would be 1 per cent. on the first £250,000 of value, 1.5 per cent. on the next £250,000 of value, and 2 per cent. thereafter.

Without access to the full Revenue figures, it is complex to work out the likely implications of trying to balance the revenue. I strongly suspect, particularly given the facts that I have mentioned, that we would be able to secure the same revenue with only small adjustments in the bands, and that the system would be a great deal fairer.

The amendments show an unfairness in the structure of the stamp duty that the Government have introduced. We do not like the changes because they are skewed towards the commercial sector, as the Government have run away from taxing the personal sector. We would prefer the Financial Secretary to withdraw the proposals tonight. We will put that to a vote.

In any case, if, given the exigencies of time, the Financial Secretary does not feel that she can adequately reply to the debate tonight, I hope that she and her advisers will go away and think about a better structure to operate in the future. There was no problem with the previous rates, but the changes that the Government have made by evolution from the traditional structure have created gross unfairness and will do significant damage.

Mr. Gibb: We have already seen an example tonight of old Labour emerging from behind the mask of new Labour, with its antipathy to medical insurance.

With the doubling of the rate of stamp duty, we hark back to the era of the last Labour Government. The first Budget of that Government, on 26 March 1974, did precisely the same as the present Budget in doubling the rate of stamp duty from 1 to 2 per cent. Fortunately, in a subsequent Conservative Budget in March 1984, the rate of stamp duty was reduced again to 1 per cent.

It has always been my view that stamp duty should be repealed. In today's society, there is no longer a role for stamp duty. It was my hope that the previous Government had as a long-term aim the ultimate abolition of this anachronistic tax. Labour Members may recall that in the 1990 Budget, the Chancellor began the process of abolishing stamp duty on share

[Mr. Gibb]

transactions, a move which was linked to the implementation of the TAURUS computer system in the London stock exchange. Alas, with the demise of that system, so went the abolition of stamp duty on share prices. I am, however, still hopeful that a future Conservative Government will get round to abolishing stamp duty on shares and on property transactions.

This Government are moving in the opposite direction. They have begun their period in office by doubling the rate of stamp duty which will raise £240 million in 1997–98 and £490 million in 1998–99. It is another example of this Government scrabbling for every penny, oblivious of the damage to the wider economy that such measures cause. They are oblivious to the 0.06 per cent. fall in GDP as a result of this one measure and they are oblivious to the thousands of job losses it will cause, particularly in the construction industry. Those are facts, according to the Centre for Economic and Business Research which has shown that there will be a fall of 0.75 per cent. in private housing sector output as a result of this measure. The Government appear to be oblivious to all the indirect and unforeseen consequences of this one Budget measure, which is being implemented simply to scrabble extra millions for their long-term spending plans.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said, stamp duty applies to business properties as well as to residential properties. It applies, for example, to the transfer of good will and to businesses whose sale or disposal requires transfer by document. Those documents have to be stamped with a rate of 1 per cent. and, now, some will be stamped with a rate of 2 per cent.

This measure will hit the commercial sector disproportionately harder than the residential sector, yet we were told that it was introduced to help to dampen down the residential property market. Three quarters of all stamp duty is paid by the residential sector, but three quarters of the stamp duty increase will fall on the commercial side.

The measure will distort business. Throughout much of the Budget, proposals are implemented for one purpose, but the results are completely the opposite. Although the Budget is meant generally to take the heat out of the domestic housing market, the abolition of tax credits on dividends receivable by pension funds, for example, will shift billions of pounds of investment from UK equities into the commercial and residential property sectors, thereby fuelling price increases. It will, therefore, have precisely the opposite effect from that intended.

The increase in stamp duty is an attack on home ownership and it joins the other attacks on home ownership in the Budget. We have had the phasing down of MIRAS, we have had three interest rate rises in as many months, and now we have the increase in stamp duty. It is yet another of the many examples of distorting measures in the Budget.

Clause 8, for example, will end the freezing of duty on beer. That will distort the market in beer and will lead to higher levels of smuggling. Clause 19 introduces a distorting measure with the abolition of ACT credits which will mean massive changes to the investment policies of pension funds and other institutions in the City. We have seen the distorting effects of clause 20; the abolition of section 242 relief will have an effect on open-ended investment companies. We have also seen the distorting effect of clause 30 with the abolition of tax credits for non-tax-paying individuals, whereas we are keeping tax credits for higher-rate and basic-rate taxpayers. There are also distorting effects in clause 42, with the implementation of temporary first-year allowances for only small and medium-sized enterprises.

The amendment is designed to end the slab scale of the previous stamp duty regime. The intention behind it is the introduction of a rising scale of stamp duty measures so that we do not have yet another distorting measure. For example, if someone happens to be selling a house at a price that approaches one of the arbitrary sums imposed by the Government—£60,000, £250,000 or £500,000—there is an enormous difference when it comes to consideration of whether the contract should be one of those sums. Sellers and buyers will go to enormous lengths to recategorise the assets that are being sold, such as fixtures and fittings or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry said, light bulbs or light switches. The Government's proposal will have an enormous distorting effect in the marketplace.

The amendment will do much to reduce or eliminate one of the many distorting effects introduced by the Government in the Budget. I hope that it will be agreed to.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alistair Darling): The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) having been signalled to resume his place by his colleagues, I shall make a few comments before we conclude this evening's proceedings.

The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) made four points, one of which had some substance. I shall return to it briefly. First, he invited my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to visit Bush house to watch the stamping process. As a legal apprentice, I watched documents being stamped on many occasions, and fascinating is not a word which I would use to describe the process. I would say, however, that the opportunity to get out of the office, especially on a nice, hot summer's day, was something which I and all my fellow apprentices used to welcome.

Secondly, the hon. Member for Daventry said that we might have had more time to discuss these matters had it not been for the guillotine. I shall not pretend to be the best attender of debates in Standing Committee, because my other duties kept me elsewhere, but I have read the reports of the proceedings. If Conservative Members had not spent so much time discussing their Welsh mothers, tours of south America and various other discursions on Americanisms and other matters, there might have been more time to spend on the Bill. I have come to the conclusion, as have many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, that Conservative Members seemed determined never to finish consideration of the Bill because they wanted to claim that the guillotine was operating against them.

It is said that there is no overheating in the economy, especially in the housing market. I suppose that that will always be a matter of judgment. Suffice it to say that we reached the judgment that action was necessary to encourage stability in the housing market. I think that we would have the support of many members of the public, bearing in mind the heavy price that they paid for the unsustainable housing boom that was caused by the Conservative party's policies in the 1980s. We can agree to disagree, but we believed that action was necessary. Our proposal will raise valuable revenue. We do not shrink from the fact that that revenue is needed to finance the debt reduction programme that is necessary because of the large levels of debt that we inherited from the outgoing Conservative Government.

Mr. Woodward: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Darling: No. I do not have time to allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene. Indeed, he has not spoken in the short debate to which I am responding.

I take up the one issue raised by the hon. Member for Daventry that had some substance, although I do not agree with the conclusion that he reached. Should we have a slice system or confine ourselves to what he described as a slab system? The slab system may have problems and in some respects it may be deficient, but it is the system which the Conservative Government operated in the 1970s. Indeed, it is the same system that the Conservative Administration operated in the early 1990s.

It is possible to have a slice system—I do not quarrel with that—and the amendment, if agreed to, would result in quite a significant loss of revenue. For that reason alone, I would recommend the House should reject it. But the suggestion that not introducing a slice system would be negligent does not stand up. The hon. Member for Daventry claims that he has wished something could be done ever since he started studying taxation, but he did nothing over the past 18 years while the Conservatives presided. I recognise the problems to which he has referred, but I believe that the proposal in the Bill is the right one. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to reject the amendment and to support the clause as it stands.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 135, Noes 367.

Division No. 70] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir David Madel and
Mr. James Cran.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard *(Shef'ld Hallam)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon
(Dunfermline E)
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard

Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie *(Scarborough)*
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon

Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Webb, Professor Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John McFall and
Mr. David Clelland.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, further consideration of the Bill stood adjourned, pursuant to Order [14 July] and Resolution [this day].

Bill, not amended (in the Committee), and as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered tomorrow.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

INSURANCE PREMIUM TAX

That the Insurance Premium Tax (Taxable Insurance Contracts) Order 1997 (S. I., 1997, No. 1627), a copy of which was laid before this House on 2nd July, be approved.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT (SUMMER)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Periodic adjournments),

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 31st July, do adjourn till Monday 27th October.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

ACCOMMODATION AND WORKS

Ordered,

That Janet Anderson, Sir Sydney Chapman, Sir Patrick Cormack, Mr. Andrew Dismore, Mr. George Mudie, Ms Linda Perham, Sir Raymond Powell, Mr. Syd Rapson and Mr. David Rendel be members of the Accommodation and Works Committee.—*[Mr. George Mudie, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

ADMINISTRATION

Ordered,

That Mr. James Cran, Mr. David Crausby, Mr. Hilton Dawson, Mr. Fabian Hamilton, Mr. Stephen Hepburn, Jane Kennedy, Mrs. Marion Roe and Mr. William Ross be members of the Administration Committee.—*[Mr. George Mudie, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

CATERING

Ordered,

That Mrs. Jackie Ballard, Mr. Stephen Day, Mrs. Janet Dean, Mr. Thomas Graham, Mr. Lindsay Hoyle, Helen Jones, Mr. Patrick McLoughlin, Dr. John Marek and Mr. Dennis Turner be members of the Catering Committee.—*[Mr. George Mudie, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

INFORMATION

Ordered,

That Mr. Richard Allan, Mr. Ian Bruce, Mr. Michael Connarty, Mr. Neil Gerrard, Mr. Jon Owen Jones, Mr. Andrew Miller, Mrs. Sandra Osborne, Mr. Phil Sawford and Mr. John Whittingdale be members of the Information Committee.—*[Mr. George Mudie, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Mr. Harry Barnes, Mr. Roy Beggs, Mr. Peter Brooke, Mr. Desmond Browne, Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson, Mr. John Grogan, Mr. Andrew Hunter, Mr. Ken Livingstone, Mr. Eddie McGrady, Mr. Tony McWalter, Ms Margaret Moran, Mr. Peter Robinson and Mr. Martin Salter be members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee.—*[Mr. George Mudie, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

TRANSPORT AND WORKS

That the draft Transport and Works (Guided Transport Modes) (Amendment) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 7th July, be approved.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Question agreed to.

BROADCASTING

Ordered,

That Mr. Ivor Caplin, Mr. Eric Clarke, Mr. Roger Gale, Mr. George Galloway, Mrs. Eileen Gordon, Mr. David Lepper, Mr. Stephen Pound, Mr. Jonathan Sayeed, Mr. Andrew Stunell, Mr. Mike Wood and Mr. Shaun Woodward be members of Select Committee on Broadcasting.—*[Mr. George Mudie.]*

Genetic Patenting

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

10.13 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): On 15 July, the European Parliament discussed and approved the proposed EC directive for the legal protection of biotechnological inventions or gene patenting. That decision reversed the position of the European Parliament in 1995 and the Labour party's position at the time. It is likely to have far-reaching and uncertain consequences. For that reason, I am immensely grateful that the House has afforded me the opportunity to air the concerns of a great many people.

Since it was announced that I had been successful in the ballot for the debate, I have been contacted by many organisations and individuals, including my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) and the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), who hope to make some brief comments tonight. I know that we are not alone in our concerns. The Government's view on the issue appears to be confused. I welcome the Minister's presence tonight and I hope that he can clarify where the Government stand and how they will respond to the debate that is now emerging.

I have been told that several organisations, including the Women's Environmental Network and the Gaia Foundation wrote to the Minister in advance of the European Parliament vote requesting the Government's views. At least one—the Women's Environmental Network—was told that the British Government were awaiting the final text from the European Commission. As the Government's position was not made clear, it assumed that a position had not been taken in advance of seeing the final text of the directive.

Meanwhile, the Minister informed a scientific political adviser at Greenpeace that the Government intended to hold a public meeting for all interest groups once the text of the Commission's amended draft was known. Again, it appeared that the Labour Government were prepared to listen and consult before taking a final position.

I would like to congratulate the Minister on that approach, which I believe to be correct, but I cannot do so because, on the same day that that letter was written, another letter was winging its way across Europe to United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament. That letter, also from the Minister, was also about the forthcoming vote, but its message was rather different. It explained how important the new Government considered the directive to be for the future of the United Kingdom and European biotechnology industry and urged all Members of the European Parliament to vote for the directive.

I do not intend to be over critical as I wish to raise some important issues, but it is important that the Minister explains how those conflicting statements came to be made. More importantly, as I want to look forward rather than back, will the Minister outline the Government's current position on what is still an emerging discussion that has not reached its final conclusions? Is he for or against a fuller debate and if he is in favour should it not be before rather than after urging support for the directive in Europe?

Liberal Democrats are not opposed to new and appropriate technology. I have listened to the arguments of those in favour of the directive who have been as vocal as those who are against it. However, a recognition of the potential that genetic engineering offers must not lead us to set aside consideration of the possible pitfalls. Above all, we should not encourage faster development here—as the directive will do in practice—in order simply to protect the United Kingdom's competitive position at the cost of long-term risks.

The draft directive would allow human body parts, including DNA, genes and cells, to be patentable outside the human body even though they have an identical structure to their natural counterparts. The directive would also cover cloned animals and genetically engineered food.

Industry says that it needs the directive. It argues that every year the pharmaceutical industry produces new, innovative products that relieve suffering, create employment and reward investors who fund research. For that potential to be realised, those who invest in long-term, high-risk biotechnology research need to know that the possible fruits of their investment will be protected from copyists. Hence, the industry argued the need for patent protection for inventions involving molecules such as proteins, DNA, enzymes and antibodies, which are needed for the treatment and diagnosis of diseases. Without patents, it says, there will be little innovation and no cures.

According to the Minister, however, the draft directive does not render anything patentable that is not patentable under current UK law. If current laws are not adequate, why does the Minister support a new law that does nothing different? I fear that, on the contrary, the European directive will make a difference beyond simply European integration of the rules. That is why commercial concerns are eager to see it in place.

In contrast, organisations that are against such genetic patenting include the Clinical Genetic Society and the Human Genome Organisation—the international body that co-ordinates research into the sequences of the human genome. Opposition also comes from the Royal Society, which has said:

> "The Royal Society is strongly opposed to any attempts to patent genetic information that is unrelated to the function of use of relevant genes. Commercial pressures in this direction pose a grave threat to scientific research and a hindrance to its ultimate medical applications."

The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee on human genetics concluded in its third report that

> "there manifestly is no consensus on a Directive to harmonise patent law and we consider that the imposition of a Directive could be more harmful than the differences in the criteria for patentability in different countries under the current system."

The Select Committee did not oppose any form of patenting. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) spoke to me earlier about the important concerns that the Committee raised about patenting material that is identified without any change, as distinct from the techniques used or the specific use to which it is to be put. If such patenting happens, I fear that there will be a constriction on the research available. That is the background to the concerns that have been raised.

Some patient groups are opposed to genetic patenting—though others are in favour of it—in spite of apparently being the clearest potential beneficiaries. The American patient umbrella group NORD—the National Organisation for Rare Disorders—has spoken out against patenting of genes, arguing that it will have a negative effect on research. Incidentally, that organisation supports the orphan drug law, which offers tax incentives, among other benefits, to companies involved in research and development. We are not talking about opposition to the principle of the uses to which such research can be put, but a real concern about further research or useful medical use being restricted because of the costs.

The European Union has already produced a draft proposal for a European Parliament and Council regulation on orphan medical products, which is due for discussion. However, the patent draft directive is being discussed without co-ordination.

Other reasons for the concerns of such disparate bodies are clear. Perhaps the most important is that there are many who believe that the directive will threaten future scientific and medical research. In the United States, where such patents already exist, the concerns that I have expressed have become a reality. The United States company, Biocyte, has a sweeping patent on the use of all human blood cells from the umbilical cord of a new-born. That is being disputed by US and European medical groups, because it threatens the free use of such cells for transplant and research.

The Minister should also bear in mind the experience of the Manchester Regional Genetics Centre, which received an unexpected bill from a Toronto-based company demanding a $5,000 licence fee, plus a royalty of $4 per test for every time the centre used a cystic fibrosis gene screening test on which the company had previously filed a patent application. The centre cannot afford that, and I fear that many others in the national health service will not be able to.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): As the hon. Gentleman knows, Eurocord, the international organisation of cord blood banks, has challenged Biocyte's patent. Does that not highlight the fact that patents are being granted far too widely—the point made in the Select Committee report? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if the proposals in the report were adopted, many of the concerns that he is raising could be addressed?

Mr. Taylor: I agree. I mentioned the report a moment ago for that reason. The Americans are patenting too much and too widely, but the European directive appears to be drawn equally widely in its potential application.

I shall not concentrate on those issues tonight, but I do not believe—as the Government argue—that patenting has no relation to the wider ethical, moral and environmental issues. There are real concerns about animal cruelty, the effect on biodiversity, the impact on farmers—particularly in developing countries—and our ability to control the after-effects of the technology. We are moving further into the commercial development and patenting sector than our ability to control the issues yet allows us. That is the imbalance about which I am concerned.

I suspect that the Minister will argue both that clear patenting laws are necessary to protect investment and innovation and that existing UK law already allows such protection. It is certainly true that some advances in biotechnology are already patentable. A body of case law regulations is already in place in national patent offices and the European patent office. The EPO is however an independent international organisation, granting European patents according to the European patent convention, which has been signed by European Union member states and several European states that are not in the EU.

There are provisions in the European patent convention that govern relations between national patent offices and the EPO in order to harmonise national and European laws while maintaining an important degree of subsidiarity. That system has been in place for more than 20 years, and during that time, case law has built up important nuances and precedents that I understand are not contained in the proposed directive. I wonder why it is felt that it is right to ignore that history and the slower evolution of matters rather than go for the big-bang approach of a single directive.

Moreover, in the past few weeks, the European Commission has announced the publication of its Green Paper on the creation of a Community patent. That paper should have preceded the proposed directive. It is a consultation document, open to public view and opinion, whereas, in contrast, the biotechnological patenting directive is a legislative document which will have direct effect on Community and national law. It seems that the cart is before the horse.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Does the hon. Gentleman think that it would be helpful for the UK to make two specific submissions? First, perhaps there is a case for less rather than more patenting. Secondly, we ought to be exploring the notion of public goods. Where there has been a financial contribution to research schemes—direct or indirect—either by Governments, charities or voluntary participants, that should be translated into a public stakeholding in goods which cannot be patentable.

Mr. Taylor: I would certainly be interested to consider that, although I do not think that it would necessarily be simple. There are question marks over how far back the research goes for it to be considered that there had been public input. Nevertheless, the point is interesting. I shall turn later to how wide genetic patenting appears to go beyond anything in the past.

If the draft directive is adopted by the Commission, which institution does the Minister believe will have authorisation to grant patents—the EPO or the Commission? To which institution will national patent offices be finally responsible? Which institution will regulate and, in cases of contravention, prosecute?

It has been argued by some that the directive is necessary to clarify advances in genetic patenting. I fear that it is more likely to lead to confusion. There is confusion not only in the consequences of the directive but in its wording. The issue of human cloning, for example, has been left vague. It is true that the directive excludes

"procedures for human reproductive cloning"

and

"methods in which human embryos are used",

but technically an embryo is a fertilised cell—a stage bypassed when the now infamous Dolly the sheep was cloned. The language used and the scope for restrictions are therefore demonstrably flawed.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that, just as it was said in the 1930s that

[Mr. Norman Baker]

where one begins by burning books one ends up by burning people, where one begins by experimenting and patenting parts of animals and plants one ends up by patenting parts of human bodies? Does he agree that the directive could have significant detrimental effects on animal welfare? Is he aware that the Minister sought to press Members of the European Parliament to widen the conditions under which animals could be patented beyond medical benefits to other benefits? Does he agree that it is better to go slow rather than fast in this area because significant matters are at issue? We need to be careful because once something is unleashed, it is difficult to recall it.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend makes some important points. I certainly have concerns about animal welfare implications in some areas. I do not have time to dwell on those points in detail. It is a huge area and the debate is short.

The processes for production of human beings other than by cloning are not mentioned explicitly. The draft directive excludes

> "methods for the artificial production of human embryos containing the same genetic information as another human being or dead person."

That is unusual wording which leaves unanswered the question of the production of a human being with different genetic information with, for example, a slowed-down aging process.

The Roslin Institute, which cloned Dolly, has filed a patent application for the technique covering human cloning as well as the cloning of sheep. What is the Government's view on that application? To be fair to the Roslin Institute, it has claimed that that has been done to prevent others from producing a human clone with the technique. Nevertheless, the principle of patenting the technique raises some real concerns.

Biotechnology developments have outpaced our ability to oversee and regulate them. Genetically modified soya bean is in the food chain, and we have no ability to label or police it. Genetically modified organisms are entering the natural environment, from which they cannot be retrieved, and yet no one can be certain of the long-term effects. Plant and animal varieties are increasingly coming under the control of industrial conglomerates, as is scientific research.

The Minister's letter to British Members of the European Parliament argues that British industry would be hampered if the directive were not passed. However, European patents are valid only in European countries that are party to the European patent convention. Therefore, if a European company is not granted a European patent for a specific application, a US or Japanese firm will not be granted one either. If a European firm wishes to apply to the US patent office, it can do so. If a US patent is granted, the European firm is allowed exactly the same patent rights as a US or Japanese firm holding the same patent. I can, therefore, see no reason why the present patent-granting system should affect European industry's international or competitive position, or any reason to rush into taking decisions.

The key issue is whether genetic patents should be broader in scope than those in other fields and, crucially, whether someone who isolates and characterises natural material should be able to patent the material itself, rather than the method for doing so or the use to which it is put. The discoverer has not necessarily contributed anything to the material, merely identified and isolated it. If that principle had been applied to chemistry, the elements themselves would have been patented. Isolated elements are not inventions, although the technique used to remove the element may be inventive.

Patents should therefore only be granted on the inventive process developed to isolate the element or perhaps the use to which it is put. Otherwise, it would be possible for a biomedical company to control completely all future research and medical development that arose from the isolation of a specific gene. That would not foster research, but kill it. It would also make the possibility of genetic testing for disorders, such as heart disease or breast cancer, potentially prohibitively expensive—too expensive for our overstretched NHS. In those respects, the directive threatens the foundations of scientific research and medical action—the free access to material and the freedom to pursue promising lines of inquiry. That is my concern and the reason why I have brought the issue to the House.

10.32 pm

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): I thank the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) for initiating this debate because it brings together important issues of scientific research, ethics and the implications for human beings and animals and the law. As the House knows, much of our law is based on property law and the amalgam of those issues is an important focus for debate. To some extent, the debate is helpfully premature. By that I mean that the debate has been sparked by the European Commission's proposal to harmonise patent law in Europe. That proposal will probably arrive before the House in some two to four years' time when, I hope, it will be fully debated under the affirmative resolution procedure.

The hon. Member is right to suggest that we get ahead of the debate. We debated the issue on 11 July at the instigation of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), although I was sad that more hon. Members were not present. However, at the current rate of one debate a week, the subject will get a fair hearing over the next four years, which is right and proper.

Biotechnology is a relatively recent area of science and it is already providing us with steroids to treat asthma and rheumatoid arthritis, improved forms of insulin for diabetes, vaccines for hepatitis B, monoclonal antibodies for the treatment of cancer and diagnostic test kits for use in blood and food hygiene testing. I do not want to suggest that all biotechnology is bad; in all fairness, I do not think that the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell suggested that that it was either. Others spoke on the understanding that the debate concerns scientific research, ethics and law rather than suggested that the whole lot should be thrown out. That is much appreciated.

Biotechnology is already driving some of the helpful, useful medicines of the future and could be the key to well-being and quality of life. Its contribution to the future may be enormous. It will offer the possibility of improved diagnosis and treatment for a range of conditions—some of which are apparently incurable at present—and that must be welcome. It will provide benefits not only for animal health but for animal feed, seeds and plants and it will improve the ability of crops to withstand extremes of climate while reducing the need for reliance on pesticides and herbicides. That in itself must be good. It will enable crops to be grown in drought-hit parts of the world and contribute to tackling world poverty and obtaining international food security.

We as parliamentarians should see our job as this: to do our best, in the ambiguous world of science, to ensure that scientific developments are life enhancing and not dehumanising. It is in that context that anxieties about patenting, in particular, are important. I appreciate the anxieties that new technology can create—for instance, worries about genetically modified foods, the prospect of cloning and the application of technologies to the very substance of life itself. We need to ensure that regulations safeguarding human health and dignity, the environment and animal welfare play a key role in creating and maintaining public confidence. I entirely accept the need for us to ensure that regulation keeps pace with scientific developments, to the best of our abilities, and I welcome the fact that our debates are ahead of decisions that may be made four years hence.

Although the patent system is long established and although the concept of registered invention is broadly understood, the system remains incredibly complex legally. It is worth running over a few of the ground rules within which the current United Kingdom system operates.

Patents encourage research by providing an opportunity to cover costs, but the system does not insist that the research takes place; nor does it influence the subject or direction of research. That must be for those involved in developing the technology to decide. It would be wrong to influence such decisions or to try to second guess the actions arising from them by somehow tailoring rights to specific technical subjects or directions. Patent rights are without prejudice to all other bodies of law. That means that, although a patent holder has the legal right to prevent anyone else from using an invention, that right gives him no authorisation to use or exploit it himself. Such use is entirely governed by other regulations dealing with such matters as human health and dignity. That puts the issue into a clear public legal context.

Patents give rights holders a monopoly for use of their inventions, but that lasts for a limited period. Patentees can be obliged to license their rights if it can be shown that monopolies are blocking the exploitation of other patents. It is important to note that the free use of a patented invention for experimental purposes is also allowed. When the rights cease, the invention passes into the public domain for all to use. When patents drop out of the system, inventions become generically available for anyone to work on.

In return for that kind of protection, details of the invention must be published in enough detail for the technically competent to be able to use it. The scope of that protection must be clearly stated for all to see—and to challenge if they wish. I stress that because the hon. Gentleman mentioned a particular case—the Biocyte case—to which my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) also referred. That is a demonstration of the right to challenge. People should challenge, to find out what is the scope of the patenting cover and to try to compete with the original invention.

Dr. Lynne Jones: The Select Committee recommended that those who wished to challenge the patent should have the right to challenge it before it was considered by the relevant patenting organisation rather than have to wait until the patent had been granted and then challenge it in the courts, which would take many years. Will my hon. Friend look at that? The Committee wanted the Government to act.

Mr. Battle: Yes, I shall. I have only a few moments in which to reply and I feel constrained by the fact that this is not a full debate. We can consider that and I shall come to it in more detail in a moment.

We ought to remember that patents are available only for technical inventions. Rights cannot be obtained for finding something that freely occurs in nature, such as a gene sequence; nor can they be obtained for materials in their natural state. We should be absolutely clear that the human body and its elements in their natural state are not patentable. Moreover, treatments and diagnoses when performed on the human or animal body, including those using isolated genes, are not protectable. Plant and animal varieties also cannot be patented.

Furthermore, rights can be refused or revoked if it is found that using an invention would be immoral. As I said, given the promises of biotechnology for new treatments and cures, it seems that rather than providing patents on life, as some have suggested, one might see the system as providing patents for life.

Patents are obtained for new technical solutions to problems to the extent that an invention involves intervening in the genetic make-up, which in practice means that rights can encompass gene sequences, but only when separated from nature to the extent that the product of the invention is protectable. In other words, genes in their natural state cannot be patented, only new technical interventions. It is important to make that clear distinction.

As with any technology, those first in uncharted territory may be in a position to obtain patent rights that are broader than appear later to be justified once the area has been explored further. There has been concern that that may be happening in biotechnology—precisely the point that the hon. Gentleman raised. I must emphasise, however, that rights can always be challenged. That means that the judiciary should be ready to review the scope of the patentee's legal entitlement.

A recent case before the House of Lords—Biogen *v.* Medeva —has shown that monopolies can be cut back if they move into areas outside their legitimate scope. That case involved the ownership of a gene sequence relating, I think, to hepatitis B. As parts of that monopoly could not have been understood at the time, the court ruled against it. The courts can cut access to rights. Existing claims can be challenged and it is important to remember that.

I must say a few words about the European Commission's directive. It has a history—it was proposed as long ago as January last year. We managed to get the first opinion on the original proposal on 16 July. Some 70 amendments to the Commission's proposal were

[Mr. Battle]

passed, including a suggestion from one Member of the European Parliament that an ethics committee should be created. We support that suggestion. We were asking the Commission to give us a proposal. That was the idea. There was nothing to discuss because the question had fallen into a void.

Essentially, the European Commission's proposal is a single market measure to extend or change the existing patent system in Britain. It is designed to enhance the operation of a single market in biotechnological products rather than to change the law in Britain.

The European Parliament's amendments were passed and we now need to study carefully the proposals that were put together from those amendments. We do not even have the final text of that document. When the proposals emerge, they will be put before us.

The European Commission is expected to amend its proposal in the light of the Parliament's opinion and to submit that to the Council of Ministers for adoption. Until the Commission's amended proposal emerges, it is not possible to determine the precise text that will be put before the Council of Ministers dealing with the internal market.

When the Council is able to reach a common position on the text, it will be sent back to the European Parliament, which will produce a second opinion. Only when the Council and Parliament have agreed will the directive be put forward for adoption in the member states. At that stage, we can discuss the statutory instrument in this Chamber and in Committee and there will be a full debate in the other place.

We are a long way from debating the detail. What we needed was a text to debate and that was the purpose of my letters, which were played off, one against another, rather unfairly.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at seventeen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 29 July 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Read the Third time, and passed.

LEVER PARK BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Tuesday 28 October.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Mobile Homes

1. **Mr. Dawson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the Mobile Homes Act 1983. [9346]

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Ms Hilary Armstrong): My Department is currently considering a number of concerns raised by mobile home residents relating to mobile home legislation. It is too early to say what will be the outcome of those considerations.

Mr. Dawson: I am delighted to hear that the matter is under active consideration. Does my hon. Friend agree that, although park home living can be a comfortable, peaceful and safe way of life for elderly people in their retirement, there are significant difficulties with the legislation due to severe loopholes within which poverty and exploitation can exist? I am pleased that my right hon. Friend is considering the legislation. Will she also examine the role of local authorities in the inspection and registration of park home sites? Does she agree that the way forward is through a clear partnership between the sensible and able parts of the industry, park home owners, local authorities and a reforming Labour Government?

Ms Armstrong: I agree with my hon. Friend. I have been learning a great deal about park homes as they are now called, or mobile homes as most of us know them. I look forward to meeting the all-party group later in the year to consider some of the issues that he has raised.

Mr. Viggers: If the hon. Lady reviews the law relating to mobile homes, will she take care not to diminish excessively the rights of site owners to control the sites, because in areas such as my constituency, where Kingfisher park has a central location, a site could deteriorate rapidly if site owners did not have their current powers to control the site and maintain high standards?

Ms Armstrong: Of course we are concerned to support the overwhelming number of reputable site owners. However, we are also concerned about a number of disreputable site owners. We want to achieve the correct balance so that site owners and those living on the sites feel safe, secure and able to work together for the betterment of all.

Regional Development Strategy

2. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to involve a comprehensive range of expertise in developing his proposals for a regional development strategy. [9347]

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): We are conducting wide-ranging consultation with all the main stakeholders nationally and in the regions on our proposals for regional development agencies involving stakeholders.

Mr. Sheerman: I congratulate my right hon. Friend. I know of his long interest and campaigning zeal for regional development since the early 1980s. Will he take great care to make sure that all the stakeholders are involved? If the regional development strategy seems to be in the ownership of local authorities, we shall lose enormous expertise from the private sector, co-operatives and—very importantly—the universities. I hope that all the stakeholders will be at the forefront of implementing the policy and making sure that it works.

Mr. Prescott: I very much agree with my hon. Friend about those matters, which we are discussing with all the parties that he has mentioned. We would need public-private partnership operations to be reflected in the development associations and agencies, as they have been in Scotland and Wales—another successful innovation of a previous Labour Government.

Mr. Dafis: Will the Secretary of State tell us something about the Government's proposals in relation to integrating environmental policy into regional development policy? Does he have proposals, for example, at regional level to build on local Agenda 21s so that we have regional sustainable development strategies? How does he envisage that linking with the development of regional government in England?

Mr. Prescott: We very much support what the hon. Gentleman has said. Indeed, it is reflected in today's announcement of proposals for the Greater London authority, which see a strategic role for the environment in London as much as in any other region. It is important that sustainable development means that economic and environmental considerations are taken together, which is often to the benefit of the prosperity of the regions involved.

Mr. Blizzard: May I say how much businesses and local authorities in East Anglia are looking forward to the establishment of a regional development agency? When my right hon. Friend considers the siting of the agency's headquarters, will he consider the economic impact that it could have, and consider siting it in the less prosperous parts of the region rather than in parts which always seem to be used by the Government for offices?

Mr. Prescott: I have never had any doubt that every region wanted a development agency. The tours in which my hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning has been involved have convinced us all the more of that. I recall that, before the previous Government came to power, they proposed in their manifesto to abolish the Welsh and Scottish agencies. They chose not to do so as soon as they saw the very valuable work done by the agencies.

With regard to the second point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), we must be very careful, in the name of decentralisation, not to centralise in the regions themselves. That applies as much to the development agency as it does to political accountability. We are very sensitive to that.

Sir Norman Fowler: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the welcome for regional development agencies about which the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) talked is not remotely shared around the country? Is it not a fact that the new regional development agencies will not only have exceptionally wide powers, from acquisition of land to financing of business, but that every member of the boards of the RDAs will be appointed by the Secretary of State? Rather than reducing the power of quangos, as he often claims, is he not in the process of creating one of the most powerful new quangos that the country has ever seen?

Mr. Prescott: It is a bit of a cheek for any Opposition Member to talk about the role of quangos, since they created many thousands of them—involving billions of pounds—which were not accountable to the ordinary electorate. We intend to make our agencies accountable. Today's statement on London showed that. When we have completed the consultation and the White Paper is published, the right hon. Gentleman will see—if he waits—the conclusions of those discussions. He belonged to a Government who did not believe in a directly elected mayor. I see that they have changed their position in opposition. Perhaps he will change with the consultation.

Recycling

3. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to encourage recycling for environmental reasons. [9350]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Angela Eagle): We are looking carefully at both existing measures and at possible further measures to increase recycling. Recycling makes sense only if it represents the best practicable environmental option for a particular waste stream.

Mr. Canavan: As the foundry industry is a recycling industry, will my hon. Friend support its strong case that the greensand that it uses should be treated as inactive waste and therefore subject only to the lower rate of landfill tax of £2 per tonne rather than the higher rate of £7 per tonne? Now that the Environment Agency has commissioned a special study into the matter, will the Department make appropriate representations at the appropriate time to ensure a fair outcome for the foundry industry and those employed in it?

Angela Eagle: As my hon. Friend will know, the landfill tax has been in existence for less than a year. We plan to look at how it operates this autumn, and I shall ensure that his comments are passed on to the people responsible for doing that. We shall see whether we can ensure that greensand has been properly classified for the purposes of landfill charge.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Have the Government accepted, and are they implementing, the strategy set by the previous Government, aimed at recycling one quarter of all household waste by 2000 AD?

Angela Eagle: We certainly hope to achieve the targets set by the previous Government, and perhaps even to improve on them. However, the mechanisms that they put in place for achieving the recycling targets are totally inadequate. As yet, only 6.5 per cent. of material is recycled and 12.5 per cent. recovered. The previous Government were good at setting the target but not so good at examining ways to achieve it. We shall consider issues such as recovery, waste minimisation, recycling, and the effects of the way in which the landfill tax works, so that we can introduce better incentives for reaching the targets that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: I welcome the progress made towards increasing the recycling of glass, but will my hon. Friend examine ways of encouraging manufacturers to recycle bottles, which is common in other countries, as a means of making further energy savings?

Angela Eagle: As my hon. Friend will know, the markets for recycled material are only just beginning to be established, and because of the large fluctuations in prices for such materials, they are not yet stable. My hon. Friend will be aware of the waste packaging regulations that have just been introduced, and we are assessing how those work. The Government are not only examining ways of encouraging the creation of markets for recyclable materials, but thinking about what we can do to encourage a more stable atmosphere, in which people can recycle.

There is overwhelming evidence that individuals wish to recycle. In response to a Gallup poll, 95 per cent. said that they wanted to do so. We want to create stable conditions in which it is easy for people to recycle, so that the streams of recyclable materials now being produced can be put to proper use, rather than ending up wonderfully separated but back in the landfill.

Mr. Bob Russell: On the basis that Governments should lead by example, is the ministerial team happy with the record that it inherited, especially with regard to Government Departments? What steps do Ministers plan to take to improve on the previous Government's record?

If the Minister would like an example, may I direct her attention to the excellent record of Colchester borough council?

Angela Eagle: We are more than anxious to examine best practice at local authority level and in other areas. The Government can learn a good deal from some of the innovative schemes that local authorities have put in place. However, only 8 per cent. of local authorities are approaching even the targets that the previous Government set. Clearly, we must look to our own behaviour, which is why I recently hosted a conference on green procurement.

Decentralisation

4. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ensure that the English regions are not excluded from forthcoming decentralisation legislation. [9351]

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): A Bill to provide for regional development agencies was announced in the Queen's Speech and will be introduced in the autumn. That will be a first step towards decentralising decision taking in the British regions.

Mr. MacShane: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. Is he aware of the welcome in the country for Labour's moves towards handing some power back to the people, after the years of corrupt Tory rule during which the Conservative party treated the state as its private property, ruled from London? As a fellow South Yorkshire Member of Parliament, is the Minister aware that, in a year or two, when we have a Scottish Parliament, a Welsh Assembly and a mayor in London, the 7 million people of Yorkshire might say, "What about us?" What plans does he have to continue the process of ensuring that the voice of the British regions is heard, and that they have more accountability and more control over the decisions that affect their daily lives?

Mr. Caborn: I thank my hon. Friend for the due modesty that he always shows in asking supplementaries. I assure him that we fought the election and won it handsomely on a major constitutional change; we shall follow that through. As I said in my answer, the first step is to get regional development agencies into being and then to encourage the formation of chambers. We shall then move towards elective regional assemblies when that has been determined by the people in the regions.

Opposition Members are obviously living in the past. I can assure them that the Confederation of British Industry, the chambers of commerce, the Trades Union Congress, local authorities and academia, through the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom, all support the move towards regional development agencies. I suggest that the Opposition should come into the 20th century, let alone the 21st century.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I recognise the importance of local government and I am personally sad that many duties and responsibilities were removed from local government in recent times. I speak as somebody who served in local government, and that is why I am so supportive of it. It is, however, important that government functions be taken as close to the people as possible because what affects people is government functions and responsibilities. Is it not right, in decentralising and moving in the way that the Minister has suggested, to tell people how much the change will cost and what existing local authority levels or authorities are likely to be reduced or abolished in the movement towards what the Minister described as regional agencies and regional assemblies?

Mr. Caborn: The hon. Gentleman has asked an interesting supplementary. We are dealing here with regional development agencies. I know that the hon. Gentleman is extremely interested in manufacturing.

Mr. Paice: That is not an answer.

Mr. Caborn: There are three parts to the question which I have answered already, as the hon. Gentleman would know if he had listened.

The regional development agencies are intended to address the weaknesses in the competitive base of this nation. I know that the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) understands that as well as I do in terms of the northern region. We shall bring the local authorities together—we have made that clear commitment in our manifesto—but we shall move to regional assemblies only when that change has been determined by a referendum in each of the English regions. Those referendums may take place at different times. That is the commitment we gave in our manifesto, and that is what we were elected on.

Mrs. Ellman: Will the Minister consider giving official recognition to regional chambers that already exist through voluntary means? In the north-west five years ago, for example, the public, private and voluntary sectors came together to form the North-West Regional Association and the North-West Partnership, which have brought public, private and voluntary sectors together to develop strategies for the region. Will my hon. Friend consider giving official recognition to such bodies pending the setting up of new ones?

Mr. Caborn: We shall look carefully at the consultation document. As my hon. Friend knows, it went out a few weeks ago and it will conclude on 5 September. We shall reflect on all the 10 English regions in response to the document and we shall then give a considered reply. I hear what my hon. Friend said, and her point will be taken into consideration when we review the position.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I say to the Minister, the Secretary of State and their team that the Liberal Democrats greatly welcome the honouring of the manifesto commitment to produce a Green Paper on London government. We look forward to others for the other regions of England.

Will Ministers make two points clear? First, will they ensure that the policies and finances of regional government are made much more important than the personalities? In other words, we should not get into personality politics, but should concentrate on the policies. Secondly, Ministers should make it clear that the Government have an honestly open mind in terms of ensuring that we have electoral systems for the regions that make sure that, once we establish them, no Government who are against them can take them away.

Mr. Caborn: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. It is a bit rich for Opposition Members to protest when we are honouring manifesto commitments, but I know that they have great difficulty in understanding that we are doing so.

Finance is one of the matters considered in the discussion document, and we shall reflect on that point after 5 September. The electoral system will be discussed when we decide to have a referendum, which will be some time down the road before we move to regional assemblies. The electoral system will be a point of discussion before we enter that debate.

Devolution (London and the Regions)

5. **Mr. Rhodri Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his consultations on devolution in London and the regions of England. [9352]

The Minister for London and Construction (Mr. Nick Raynsford): As my right hon. and hon. Friends said, we have consulted on our proposals for setting up regional development agencies in England. Comments are invited by 5 September. As regards London, my right hon. Friend has today laid before the House copies of the Green Paper "New Leadership for London; the Government's proposals for a Greater London Authority". We shall consult on those proposals between now and 24 October.

Mr. Morgan: I welcome progress on this issue, because it shows that the contagion of devolutionary democracy has spread from the banks of the Taff to the banks of the Thames, and even to the Tyne.

Mr. Raynsford: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for welcoming the Government's response to the clear and legitimate wish of the people of England for effective action on more devolution and a more effective say over their local economies. We are interested in delivering for the people of London and the regions of England.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that that extra layer of unwanted and unwarranted bureaucracy, which will work alongside county councils, district councils, town councils and parish councils, will inevitably reopen the debate on unitary authorities?

Mr. Raynsford: As the hon. Gentleman will no doubt be aware, in our proposals for London we are sweeping away a large number of unaccountable quangos that were set up by the previous Government, and in their place we are creating a streamlined, slimline authority. That has been warmly welcomed by those people who understand the needs of London government.

Mr. Gunnell: In his announcement today, my hon. Friend proposed a new strategic authority for London with an elected mayor. That may be welcomed by the people in London who were distressed at the abolition of the Greater London council. When we discuss the regions, we shall consider the proposals for a new strategic authority. Will an elected person act as spokesperson for the entire region or will my hon. Friend recommend that English cities in the regions consider the possibility of an elected mayor? If so, how will that fit into the current system of unitary authorities?

Mr. Raynsford: As my hon. Friend will know, the framework that we propose for London includes a directly elected mayor working with a directly elected assembly. It is interesting to note that the Conservative party, having previously opposed that concept, has recently begun a somersault. In our proposals for the regions, we shall be keen to encourage democratic innovation. A Bill will be introduced in the other place to allow innovation in local government arrangements, including the possibility of directly elected mayors in English councils. The framework that we propose for regional development agencies will allow a good measure of discretion locally on how those arrangements can best work.

Sir Norman Fowler: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, under his proposals, London will have not only a mayor, but a new Greater London authority with 32 members and a London regional development agency? Does that not create an unnecessary and expensive bureaucracy? Will he tell the House what new charges the Government are considering in order to finance that bureaucracy?

Mr. Raynsford: In today's *Evening Standard*, Simon Jenkins said that there is a clear need for the new mayor of London to be subject to a framework of democratic accountability. The Government are providing that in the form of the mayor and the assembly. We are streamlining the administration of London government and establishing a framework that will ensure that Londoners will be able to get better and most cost-effective services. There is no substance whatsoever in the allegation that charges will be substantial increased to pay for that. It will be a streamlined authority that will be cost-effective and will deliver value for money for Londoners.

Devolution (The North)

6. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions whether it remains the policy of the Government to work towards the objective of a democratically elected regional government for the north; and through what stages they intend to reach that objective. [9353]

Mr. Caborn: It remains our aim that the people should be able to decide, region by region, whether they want directly elected regional government, but that is a long-term goal. In the meantime, we are committed to supporting regional chambers established by local authorities.

Mr. Cousins: Does my hon. Friend agree that many of us in the north want to set a course towards democratic regional government and regard the proposed regional development agency as very welcome but only the first step? Does he further agree that there must be a regional representative body to accompany the agency and that when the Lord Chancellor said at the weekend that there was no evidence of demand in the north for regional government, he was not speaking for the Government as a whole?

Mr. Caborn: Our position on democratic accountability is laid out clearly in the manifesto and we have made it clear that regional chambers, based around local authorities, will be the first step towards that long-term objective. To the best of my knowledge, the Lord Chancellor was not speaking on behalf of the Government when he expressed his personal opinions in a wide-ranging article in the *Observer*. The manifesto commits us to regional chambers and, in the long term, to elected regional assemblies.

Mr. Forth: As well as considering devolution within England, have the Government given any thought to devolution to England? Is it not time that thought was given to an English Parliament or Assembly to follow the precedent that the Government are setting for Scotland and Wales? When will the people of England have a proper voice in the matter?

Mr. Caborn: The right hon. Gentleman is the last person who should lecture us on democracy. We have to dismantle the wholly undemocratic quangoland that he and his Government set up. We shall address the longer-term issues when we have sorted out all that lot.

North-west England (Environmental Audit)

7. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will conduct an environmental audit for the north-west of England; and if he will make a statement. [9354]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): A number of such audits have already been undertaken locally, including those conducted by Lancashire, Cumbria and Cheshire county councils, and the quality of life and sustainability audit recently completed by the north-west region of the Association of Local Authorities.

Mr. Jack: I thank the Minister for that answer. Will he consider again the question of an audit? If he were to carry one out, he would find that, in early July, there was a release to atmosphere of an extremely noxious substance that came in the direction of Fylde and caused great upset to many of my constituents, 300 of whom rang Transco to complain about what they thought was a major gas leak; it turned out that there was a sulphurous release from an oil and gas development operating in Liverpool bay. Will the Minister make early investigations into the matter? What specifically does he intend to do to prevent such noxious substances from reaching the atmosphere again?

Mr. Meacher: I think that the right hon. Gentleman is referring to a release from Broken Hill Proprietary—BHP—and I am certainly concerned about that; we are following it up and considering what action we can take, including prosecution.

I am also concerned about a further incident last Saturday—I am not sure whether the right hon. Gentleman was also referring to it—and both the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency have made extensive inquiries of Transco and all the chemical and petrochemical companies along the Mersey estuary, but we have still not been able to discover the cause of the leak. It may have been caused by an offshore facility—we are checking that option—or by a leak from a road tanker, but the police and the HSE have received no official report to that effect.

I am seriously concerned about such incidents, not least because the HSE already has in place a rigorous programme of proactive inspections of gas transporters such as Transco, precisely to ensure that there is compliance with the law and such incidents do not take place.

Mr. Kaufman: In considering any environmental audit in the north-west, will my right hon. Friend pay special attention to the land known as Kingswater park, which is the only open countryside that my constituents can reach on foot? Will he note that, at a public meeting at Fairfield golf club on Friday evening, hundreds of local residents expressed their total and angry opposition to any attempt by North West Water to ruin the land with its greedy and vandalising fingers?

Mr. Meacher: I am very concerned about North West Water on a number of counts—not least because the north-west has a far worse record than any other part of the country in adhering to the bathing water directive. I am also concerned about the issue raised by my right hon. Friend; if he would care to give me details, I will take the matter up personally with North West Water and, indeed, call the company in.

Mr. Yeo: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the process of environmental audit could usefully be extended to enable consideration of how the target of building 60 per cent. of new homes on previously developed land can be achieved? Or do the reported threats of the Minister for London and Construction to cover green-field sites with concrete mean that the Government have abandoned planning policies that protect the countryside and the green belt—notably, in such places as Uxbridge?

Mr. Meacher: The Green Paper to which the hon. Gentleman refers, which was issued by the former Secretary of State in the last Government—or perhaps I should call it the not-so-green paper—proposed that, initially, 50 per cent. of all houses should be built on green-field or countryside sites. The proposal was subsequently changed to a 60:40 split. That split comes from the last Government; it certainly does not come from us.

We are still considering the responses to the Green Paper and assessing the degree to which housing can be built on previously developed land. That is still the main intention. We are still very concerned about protecting green-field and countryside sites. I certainly will not take any lessons from Conservative Members, because it was they who put us in this position in the first place.

London Underground

27. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he intends to take to increase investment in London Underground. [9375]

Mr. Prescott: We [illegible] urgently looking at various options for public-private partnerships to increase investment in the underground, and we recently appointed Price Waterhouse to examine the financial implications of a range of options. The aim is to achieve our manifesto commitment

> "to improve the Underground, safeguard its commitment to the public interest and guarantee value for money for taxpayers and passengers".

Mr. Ottaway: Given the now glaringly obvious success of railway privatisation, and given Labour's willingness to change its mind about projects such as the Birmingham northern relief road, will the right hon. Gentleman now take up one of the options that he left lying around in a "Panorama" studio and admit that privatisation of London Underground is the best way forward?

Mr. Prescott: I must make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that we have inherited an underground system whose investment programme was slashed by the last Administration, along with the overrun of the Jubilee line extension project. Already, there is a shortfall of more than £700 million. The answer to the long-term investment problems of the underground is to appoint the financial advisers whom we have appointed to examine public-private partnerships. We entirely reject the outright privatisation solution of the Conservative Government.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Anyone using public transport in London will welcome my right hon. Friend's views, but I hope—in fact, I am sure—that he will look carefully at the real costs to the taxpayer of privatisation before there is any suggestion that too much private company money is put in. Does my right hon. Friend agree that—as the privatisation of the railways shows—privatisation is a way of making money for the companies, but certainly not a way of improving services for the consumer?

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend makes a very important point about some of the previous contracts on privatisation. I have been appalled on seeing some of the previous contracts arrived at between the private sector and the Department. We are looking carefully at some of those deals to avoid the mistake of giving over completely to the private sector, at the direct expense of the public sector and a poorer-quality service.

Mr. Simon Hughes: If I were to tell the Deputy Prime Minister that my Liberal Democrat colleagues, on questioning hundreds of commuters who use the three underground stations serving the people of Uxbridge, found that they were overwhelmingly of the view that London Underground should remain, in the majority, in public ownership, what would he say to them, and will he give an undertaking today that will happen?

Mr. Prescott: We would obviously say, "Vote Labour," and I hope that people will do so in large numbers to get an underground system that meets their needs and requirements. We are looking at all those options, as we have spelt out in a previous reply to a question in the House.

Bull Bars

28. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to ban bull bars on vehicles used on public roads. [9376]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. Gavin Strang): Unfortunately, progress on the European initiative to control bull bars has been slow and we are therefore reviewing other available options to tackle the bull bar issue effectively. My noble Friend the Minister for Roads will be making an announcement on how we intend to take this forward.

Mr. Flynn: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the major improvements in road safety in recent decades has been the redesign of vehicles, resulting in vehicles that absorb and reduce the shock of collisions by crumpling objects or by deflecting the objects or people that are hit? Bull bars reverse that trend and concentrate and multiply the force of a collision, often at the level of a child's head or vital organs. Was it not a disgrace that the previous Parliament and the former Minister for Transport in London talked out a Bill to reform and to ban bull bars, despite support for the Bill from 250 hon. Members on both sides of the House? When will this Government do better?

Dr. Strang: I agree with my hon. Friend that the redesign of vehicles has certainly enhanced driver and passenger safety. Furthermore, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's determined campaign on this issue. We intend to ensure that it reaches a satisfactory conclusion—if we cannot get European action, we will take national action.

Miss McIntosh: On that point, is the Minister prepared to consult with the European Commission? Does he accept that unilateral action to ban bull bars in this country will be strictly illegal under the terms of the European treaty and our membership of the European Union?

Dr. Strang: No, I do not accept that. Of course we will maintain a dialogue with the European Commission. The hon. Lady will be aware that the previous Government had a rather long dialogue, not only with the European Commission but with other members of the Council. We are determined that action will be taken. Of course European action would be better and more effective, but if we cannot get it, we believe that there is scope for national action.

Crossrail

29. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to revive the crossrail project. [9377]

The Minister for Transport in London (Ms Glenda Jackson): We are awaiting Railtrack's views on crossrail. We shall consider the project in the light of those views, once received, and of our own examination of transport priorities for London.

Mr. Gapes: Will my hon. Friend give urgent further consideration to the Montagu report on crossrail, which concluded that crossrail was economically important and viable, and to the views of London Pride that an east-west rail link across London is the first priority needed to improve transport links?

Ms Jackson: I am aware of both the report and the representations made by London Pride on this issue. It is vital that we prioritise London's transport needs strategically. I am sure that my hon. Friend and the organisations he mentioned will welcome the publication today of our Green Paper on an assembly for London, which will include strategic responsibility for transport and traffic in London.

Mr. Pickles: Even given the Green Paper, crossrail will need, at a reasonable estimate, a guarantee of some £3.5 billion. How can the Minister square that with the idea that a London assembly will not have special fund-raising powers? Is she saying that, despite its needing £3.5 billion, crossrail will receive a high priority in an integrated transport policy?

Ms Jackson: How could the hon. Gentleman sit quietly by while the previous Government spent £150 million of taxpayers' money on a feasibility study for crossrail, £126 million of which was paid to consultants on a daily rate of pay for three and a half to four years? It is a little late for him to express concern about the overall cost of crossrail when the previous Government did nothing to bring it about.

Mr. Chope: Who would have the ultimate political responsibility for priority decisions on crossrail—the elected mayor, the assembly, or the Government? Or would it be a mixture of all three, which is exactly the same chaos that we have now?

Ms Jackson: The ultimate political responsibility rests with the people of London and whomever they vote for.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

30. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his Department's proposals for the Birmingham northern relief road. [9378]

Dr. Strang: Before replying to my hon. Friend, may I refer to yesterday's written answer on this subject? It had been my clear intention that the material would be made available to hon. Members at 3.30 pm. Unfortunately, the arrangements failed and the material was late. I apologise to you, Madam Speaker, and to the House.

May I now respond to my hon. Friend's question? As she will know from the announcement that I made yesterday, we have decided to accept the recommendation of the public inquiry inspector to authorise the Birmingham northern relief road.

Dr. Jones: As my right hon. Friend will know, I do not agree with his decision. Can we at least agree that the relief road will not solve the traffic problems in the area and that that can be done only by reducing the number of vehicle movements on the road? How does my right hon. Friend plan to do that?

Dr. Strang: I agree with my hon. Friend that one private toll road in isolation will not solve the transport problems of the west midlands. We need a properly integrated transport strategy so that the people of the west midlands have choice. The new strategic through route that will be provided by the BNRR, along with a refurbished west coast main line, and local authority transport packages, will help us to provide an enhanced transport system in the west midlands. In particular, the BNRR will provide access to a new rail freight terminal at Hams Hall. Furthermore, with the policies that will be set out in our new White Paper next year, we shall move forward to a more effective transport system and better policies for the west midlands.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I never thought that I would hear myself say this, but I congratulate the Government and the Minister on their courageous and important decision, which will greatly benefit the north-west, the west midlands and the country. Many Conservative Members will back the Minister to the hilt in seeing the BNRR scheme through. It is about the most important thing that the Government could do in transport—well done.

Dr. Strang *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Time is passing and this matter is very important. The Minister may be terribly embarrassed, but he should try to reply.

Dr. Strang: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. I too believe that the importance of that strategic through route goes beyond the west midlands. It is important not only for the west midlands but for the north-west of England and Scotland.

Dr. Tony Wright: I understand the difficulty that my right hon. Friend experienced in coming to his decision in this case. Even those who are in favour of the road are incensed by the previous Government's behaviour in pulling the plug on the previously publicly funded road. The road would now be open and operating if that had not happened.

When I asked a question a few weeks ago about the penalty clauses if it was decided not to proceed with the road, I was told that the risk lay with the concessionaire. What kind of risk is it if a private concessionaire can get a road, if it is developed, or get £30 million in compensation, if it is not developed? Is it not a disgrace to the planning process if roads are approved not on their merits but because of the cost involved in not approving them?

Dr. Strang: I understand—*[Interruption.]* I am not sure how Opposition Members want to play it. This is an important matter, and I can tell that it is important to my hon. Friend. I understand the stand that he has taken, and he has identified a particularly important point. Obviously, the decision to go ahead with the road was based on strategic transport considerations, but my hon. Friend points out a failure on the part of the previous Administration. Risk was involved. Had the Government rejected the inspector's report, we could have been legally liable for substantial costs incurred by the private company.

Mrs. Spelman: Will the Minister tell us whether the Government accept the principle of road tolling?

Dr. Strang: That is an important issue. We will almost certainly want to consider it in the context of our important White Paper on an integrated transport strategy, which we shall publish next year.

Mr. Burden: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if it were possible for us to start with a blank sheet of paper, many Labour Members would not have come up with the proposed scheme for the road or the method of financing it? I agree that the importance of the Birmingham northern relief road goes well beyond the west midlands. Ninety per cent. of exports from the north-west travel through the west midlands. Although extra road capacity is not the complete solution to the problem, does my right hon. Friend agree that we need extra road capacity in that part of Birmingham in the west midlands?

Dr. Strang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As I believe the House understands, it is our policy to encourage the movement of more freight by rail, but the reality is that at present less than 10 per cent. of all freight in this country moves by rail; it is moved on the road.

BAA

31. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he proposes to review the regulatory regime for BAA with particular reference to the formula for landing charges. [9379]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Civil Aviation Authority, as the airports regulator, determines the regulatory regime for the three London airports of BAA plc and last autumn fixed the price cap to apply to charges on airlines using these airports for the five years through to 2002.

Dr. Cable: I thank the Minister for her factual reply and suggest to her that the system of regulating the privatised utilities that she inherited is deeply flawed. Is it not outrageous that world airlines should land at one of the busiest and most congested airports, pay nothing to the taxpayer for the right to land and pay landing charges that are way below the economic and environmental cost that they cause?

Ms Jackson: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the issue of airport charges is linked not only to international agreement but to the arm's-length regulation of the CAA. It is not correct to say that the charges at Heathrow are artificially low; in effect, they are higher than the charges at Gatwick and Stansted.

Mr. MacShane: Is my hon. Friend aware that planes are now landing as early as 4.30 am, adding hundreds, if not thousands, of early-morning landings to the number contributing to noise pollution levels? Will she consider increasing landing charges before 7 am, so that the people of London, from Pimlico to the west, can get a night's sleep?

Ms Jackson: The setting of airport charges is the responsibility of the regulator—the Civil Aviation Authority. Neither it nor my Department has any powers to review the existing levels until 2002.

Bridges

32. **Mr. Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress towards ensuring that all bridges within the United Kingdom meet maximum axle loading requirements for freight transported by road. [9380]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are confident that all bridges in England carrying trunk roads will be capable of bearing the heaviest lorries that will be permitted from 1 January 1999. The Government do not believe that it is necessary for all bridges on local roads to be able to carry such traffic. Local authorities are concentrating on ensuring that bridges on roads of greatest importance to such lorries are able to bear them.

Mr. Quinn: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I have spent most of my professional life building bridges. Does my hon. Friend agree that bridges are an important part of transportation and that the forthcoming review of transportation and the move towards an integrated transport system should take account of the needs of both freight and passenger traffic? Does she agree that all bridge authorities throughout the country should be allowed to participate fully in that debate?

Ms Jackson: My hon. Friend will be aware that it is the Government's overriding priority to see more freight moved by rail. That is why we hope to improve the freight grant scheme in order to ensure that the annual budget is fully spent. As part of the integration of the Departments of the Environment and of Transport, we hope that the planning regime will prevent the sale of land that could be used for freight terminal facilities.

Mr. Sayeed: Will the hon. Lady confirm whether the Government will pay all local authority costs for assessing both these road bridges and those owned by Railtrack?

Ms Jackson: As to bridges owned by Railtrack, that is an issue for local authorities and Railtrack to negotiate between them. Local authorities will have to make bids regarding the costs to them, as they did under the previous Administration.

Mr. Stevenson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the introduction of the 44-tonne juggernaut in a few years will not only possibly have a detrimental effect on bridges but certainly have a detrimental effect on principal roads and other roads that are used for transporting goods to customers? Will she take account of that point when assessing that very complicated and important issue?

Ms Jackson: My hon. Friend may be aware that it is the opinion of several that 44-tonne lorries will not cause greater damage to roads and bridges by virtue of the additional axles and the reduced weight of those individual axles. I repeat what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Quinn) earlier: it is of primary importance to the Government that we see a real shift to alternative modes of freight transport, not least to our railways.

Road Passenger Transport Services

33. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he proposes to encourage more people to use road passenger transport services. [9381]

Dr. Strang: Encouraging greater use of public transport is a key objective in developing an integrated transport policy. Our White Paper, which will be published next year, will help to identify how best we can achieve that.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I agree with the Minister's comments, but does he not think that his aspirations sit somewhat oddly with those of the Chancellor of the Exchequer who, earlier this month, imposed a swingeing 9.3 per cent. increase in diesel tax? As the Minister has been singularly unsuccessful in persuading the Treasury to the Department's point of view and policy objective, will he ask his right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to use his influence to ensure that the Chancellor does not achieve his declared aim of increasing the tax on diesel fuel by 6 per cent. in real terms in every subsequent Budget?

Dr. Strang: As the hon. Gentleman knows, increasing fuel duty is not unique to this Government—on the contrary, the previous Administration raised that duty each year. I assure the hon. Gentleman that bus travel is very important—he hints at that in his question—and we are examining how best to encourage greater use of buses. That means making bus services as economical as possible. We want people to choose to travel by bus and to leave their cars at home because buses provide such a good service.

Mr. Barnes: Is there not a large, mainly untapped, market for bus passenger transport for disabled people, who have difficulty in getting on buses and in being able to travel? If passenger authorities in various areas were encouraged to face up to that problem, they could make money out of that market. That would benefit everyone.

Dr. Strang: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. That is one reason why we want the fastest possible introduction of low-level buses: it will be much easier for disabled people to get on to a bus. Undoubtedly, throughout this country, there is great scope for increasing the use of buses by disabled people and by people who are not disabled.

Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance)

3.30 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require companies to conduct an assessment of the capability of their computer systems to deal with calender dates after 31st December 1999; and to report both on those assessments and on the actions their directors propose to take in consequence.

This is my second attempt to introduce such a Bill. The first, which the House gave me leave to introduce last December, was given an unopposed Second Reading, was amended in Committee, but had not completed its Report stage when Parliament was dissolved for the general election.

The Bill's aim is to avoid much of the widespread chaos and confusion that are being increasingly predicted to occur throughout the world at the turn of the century—in just over 29 months' time. I am grateful to those hon. Members from all parties who have again been so willing to sponsor the Bill.

The cause of the doomsday predictions is the inability of the majority of computer systems to recognise the year 2000. They use, as we all do, two digits for the year of the date instead of four. Thus, today's date is written 29/07/97 rather than 29/07/1997. Unless they are properly reprogrammed, computer systems will recognise the year 2000 as 1900, or simply reset to some other date. That will mean that they will no longer deliver what they are programmed to deliver. Because so much of Government business and daily life has come to rely on information systems, the result will be, to use a tabloid word, "catastrophe", which must be a matter of urgent concern to the House.

When the matter was first raised on the Floor of the House in my oral question to the then Prime Minister in December 1995, it was greeted with expressions of ridicule and disbelief from all sides. I suggest—or at least I hope—that most, if not all, hon. Members are now aware of the issue and realise that there is a serious problem which must be addressed. That is referred to in the updated Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology note No. 98, "The Millennium Threat—an Update", which was issued last month. It is in the Library, and I recommend it as essential background reading.

The briefing note forecasts the dangers of failure to ensure that computer systems are millennium-compliant. They include payroll systems collapsing so that workers cannot be paid; financial records losing track of investments; invoicing systems failing to generate bills or charging 100 years of interest; telecommunication networks failing; the halting of the supply of utilities such as gas and electricity; the unpredictable behaviour of embedded microchip systems in items such as elevators, bank vaults or medical equipment; and the disruption of Government systems such as those responsible for benefit payments, criminal records, medical records and revenue collection. All that has been confirmed in the report to the Cabinet by the National Audit Office, entitled "Managing the Millennium Threat", which was published in May.

In response to my Adjournment debate on the issue in June last year, the then Minister for Science and Technology, my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor), referred to the action that his Government were taking on the computer systems for which they were responsible in the public sector. He announced the establishment of TaskForce 2000, involving the private sector in raising awareness of the problem in industry and commerce, and he warned that failure to deal with it could lead to commercial collapse—a warning which I believe his successor has repeated, as has the President of the Board of Trade.

My Bill is designed to avoid such commercial collapse in the private sector of British business. It will give the owners of British companies—the shareholders—the information to which they are entitled about the security of their investment at the turn of the century. It requires companies to conduct an assessment of the capability of their computer systems to deal with calendar dates after 31 December 1999 and, in the annual report to shareholders, to report on that assessment and on the actions that their directors propose to take as a consequence.

It has been suggested that my Bill would impose new and unnecessary regulation and red tape on business, which, to their credit, the Government, like the previous one, have said they are determined to avoid. Not only is that response misleading, but it seeks to avoid the unique nature of the issue. Far from imposing new burdens on business, the Bill merely clarifies for company directors and their auditors an existing duty to give shareholders a true and fair assessment of the company as a going concern in the foreseeable future.

The Bill will help to protect the businesses of those who have acted responsibly from those who would not otherwise have acted without pressure from their shareholders, because computer systems that are millennium compliant will also fail if they are linked to those that are not.

Critics of my Bill have complained that the action that it requires businesses to take will be too costly for them to bear. My Bill imposes no such costly action; it merely obliges directors to report on their action—or inaction, as the case may be. Of course, in many cases, the cost of inaction will be the biggest burden of all—bankruptcy.

If I needed any further justification for the Bill, it came from the press conference held by TaskForce 2000 at the Department of Trade and Industry in February 1997. It was to report the outcome of a second survey, eight months after the first, to find out how British business is responding to this millennium time bomb. The very same companies that were approached the first time were approached again and asked the same question. The answers are revealing and worrying.

Whereas only 15 per cent. of senior mangers were aware of the problem last year, today 28 per cent. are. But whereas 8 per cent. of companies had completed an assessment last year, that figure has gone up to only 9 per cent. That is not a rate of progress which can or should satisfy anyone. It confirms my view that there is now no alternative but to legislate.

The Bill has received encouraging and widespread support from the top 100 companies that I consulted and whose amendments are now incorporated in it. I hope that the Government will recognise the Bill for what it seeks to achieve and that it will be given a swift enactment. If so, it might be sufficient, together with a fully supported TaskForce 2000 and other initiatives by the computer industry itself, to avoid for Britain much of the incalculable chaos and catastrophe that are being predicted if not enough is done.

Nevertheless, it remains a race against time. Only 630 days remain in which to take action. This is one of the greatest challenges facing British business today. Like the change in the millennium itself, it cannot be postponed. That is why I hope that the House will give me leave to introduce the Bill today.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Atkinson, Mr. David Amess, Mr. Frank Cook, Mr. Tam Dalyell, Dr. Lynne Jones, Mr. Nigel Jones, Mr. Charles Kennedy, Mr. Robert Sheldon, Rev. Martin Smyth, Mr. Stephen Timms, Mr. John Townend and Mr. Dafydd Wigley.

COMPANIES (MILLENNIUM COMPUTER COMPLIANCE)

Mr. David Atkinson accordingly presented a Bill to require companies to conduct an assessment of the capability of their computer systems to deal with calendar dates after 31st December 1999; and to report both on those assessments and on the actions their directors propose to take in consequence: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 November, and to be printed [Bill 58].

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As one of the sponsors of the Bill proposed by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson), and having served on the Committee stage of the previous Bill, I want to warn you not to make arrangements to be in an aircraft on new year's eve 1999 or the House of Commons could be looking for a new Speaker because the computers may have gone wrong.

Seriously, when a Member moves a very important ten-minute Bill, should not there be some Government response as soon as possible, so that, when the House returns in October, we will know the state of play on this vital subject?

Madam Speaker: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I very much appreciate his warning. I shall put it in my diary as soon as I get back to my office.

The hon. Gentleman is a long-standing Member and he knows that a ten-minute Bill is simply an application for leave to bring in a Bill. A Bill is not actually being brought in, although the public often think that it is—hon. Members are simply asking the House for leave to do so. The House has today graciously given the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) such leave.

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

[Relevant documents: The Minutes of Evidence taken before the Treasury Committee on Monday 21st July, Tuesday 22nd July and Wednesday 23rd July (HC169-i to iii).]

Not amended (in the Committee), and as amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 19

PENSION FUNDS NO LONGER ENTITLED TO PAYMENT OF TAX CREDITS

3.40 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I beg to move amendment No. 16, in page 11, line 38, after 'made', insert 'from 6th April 2004'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 17, in page 11, line 41, at end insert—

'(1A) Any claim made under section 231(2) for payment of the amount of a tax credit if or to the extent that the qualifying distribution to which the credit relates is income of a pension fund shall be made to the extent mentioned in Column 1 of the Table below if the distribution is made on or after the date in Column 2 and before the date in Column 3.

TABLE

Column 1 *Percentage of the amount or value of the distribution*	*Column 2*	*Column 3*
21	6th April 1999	6th April 2000
17	6th April 2000	6th April 2001
13	6th April 2001	6th April 2002
8	6th April 2002	6th April 2003
4	6th April 2003	6th April 2004

No. 20, in page 12, line 42, at end insert—

'(4) The Treasury may by order provide for the suspension of the operation of this section if it has reason to believe that it has had or will have adverse effects upon the number of individuals expected to opt out of the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) or upon the number of individuals in contracted-out pension schemes who are expected to opt back into SERPS.

(5) An order under subsection (4) shall be by statutory instrument and shall be subject to approval by resolution of the Commons House of Parliament.'.

No. 18, in clause 23, page 15, line 5, at beginning insert '(1)'.

No. 19, in page 15, line 6, at end insert—

'(2) The Secretary of State may by order provide that any person providing a pension shall include in any annual statement to policyholders an assessment of the impact of the provisions in that Schedule upon the policy concerned.

(3) Any order made under subsection (2) shall be by statutory instrument and shall be subject to approval by resolution of each House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Lilley: We consider the tax to be introduced under this clause to be the biggest of the 17 breaches of promise

[Mr. Lilley]

by the Labour Government in their Budget. Before the election, we received the clearest of assurances from the then Leader of the Opposition that:

> "We have no plans to increase tax at all."

Subsequently, he said:

> "Our proposals do not involve raising taxes. If we have any such proposals we will make them clear before the next election."

It was therefore extraordinary that the Government should bring in a Budget containing 17 tax rises, the biggest of which involves a £5 billion a year recurring tax on pension funds.

However, what I did not realise until recently was that it was a breach not only of a general pledge, but of a specific pledge. I understand that on 21 October last, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), who is now the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, addressed a meeting of the Institute of London Underwriters in Leadenhall street. Someone present at that meeting has written to me saying:

> "As Deputy Chairman of the Trustees of Lloyd's Superannuation Fund, I was concerned that taxing pension funds, many of which have substantial surpluses, would be a relatively painless way of raising significant revenue, so I asked him"—

the hon. Member for Itchen—

> "to give an undertaking that any future Labour government would not seek to raise taxes from these surpluses. He replied that it was no part of his proposals that Labour would touch them."

I have subsequently spoken to another person who was present at that meeting and who took notes. He confirms that his notes show, more or less word for word, that that Labour spokesman, before the election, solemnly gave an assurance that Labour had no plans or proposals to tax pension funds or their surpluses.

As we know, the primary justification that the Government have subsequently given for the tax is that the bulk will come from the surpluses of occupational pension schemes. There could not be a clearer example of breach of promise, and one for which I hope we will have a formal apology from the hon. Member for Itchen. If that is not forthcoming, we shall certainly be calling for his resignation as a junior Minister. *[Interruption.]* The Minister thinks that breaking trust with the electorate is an amusing matter, although Labour made trust the central issue in its general election campaign and said that greater trust was placed in it than in any other party.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Helen Liddell) *rose*—

Mr. Lilley: I will, of course, give way to the hon. Lady if she will apologise for her colleague.

Mrs. Liddell: I am delighted that the right hon. Gentleman has given way. Perhaps the electorate will now receive an apology, after enduring the 22 separate tax rises that were introduced in the previous Parliament by the previous Government, who did not honour their own manifesto commitments. Ultimately, they suffered the consequences for that at the ballot box.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. We had to face the electorate with that issue before us—but the Government will have to do the same. The electorate will not accept as a sufficient excuse their statement, "As we have alleged that other people did that, we felt free to do the same"—especially because the Prime Minister made trust the central issue of Labour's general election campaign.

Subsequently, we have been assured that the tax will not matter because it will not hurt. To most people, it is self-evident that extracting £5 billion a year from pension funds will make those funds £5 billion a year worse off. The funds will have to be topped up by that amount if the pensions are to give the same pensions, or they will have to pay lower pensions to people retiring.

In what has become known as the "Primarolo paradox", however, we have been assured that the measure, far from being bad for pensions, will be

> "good for pensions and pensioners, not bad for them . . . People should understand that our reforms will benefit pension funds."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1997; Vol. 297, c. 507.]

Conservative Members have sought, pressed and asked for any coherent explanation of how it is possible that extracting £5 billion a year from long-term investments made for and on behalf of pensioners can benefit pensioners, but we have received only the most incredible explanations. Nevertheless, an attempt at explanation was made.

After we received Ministers' explanation and had some suggestion that their rationale—although incoherent and incredible—is that the measure will not hurt pension funds, we asked why the Government are attempting to protect charities from the impact of an allegedly benevolent measure if it is not damaging. There was total silence from Ministers.

In our amendments, we are attempting to extend to pension funds the protection that the Government are affording charities. We are very much attempting to mirror the precise protection that Ministers have vouchsafed charities, so that we can protect pensions, at least for a period, from the damage that will be done by a damaging tax. We hope that, by the time that that protection expires, the Conservative party will be back in power and able to ensure a much more satisfactory regime for pensions and for the economy overall.

3.45 pm

Mrs. Liddell: From the right hon. Gentleman's statement, am I to take it that Conservative party policy is to restore advance corporation tax after the next general election, should it be elected?

Mr. Lilley: We will not commit ourselves on any matter whatsoever at this stage, here and now, to undo the damage that may be done by the Labour Government between now and the end of their regime. It would be foolish for us to do so. We will state our position in our manifesto for the next general election, after we have seen how much damage the Government have done and in how many spheres, and after we have determined what we can realistically promise to make good.

There can be little doubt that the measure will be immensely damaging. It can be little satisfaction to anyone to know that the best that the Minister can say about it is, "It's no worse than other Governments may do, although you may well find yourself lumbered with it, at least for a while."

I have received a letter from the Chartered Institute of Housing, which is not only a charity but a charity with a pension fund. It states:

> "We consider that changes to ACT and its potential impact on pension funds will probably require an additional 0.5 per cent.-0.75 per cent. contribution from the Institute. This money will have to be found from funds that would otherwise be committed to the development of education and training which in turn creates employment opportunities in the housing sector. You will therefore appreciate our concern with regard to the Chancellor's proposals."

Of course, the institute's problem is mirrored across the country in pension funds and in organisations with pension funds, be they charitable or commercial. They are all having to consider the extra money that they will be required to put into their pension funds and which will therefore not be available either to invest or to use for the charitable, educational or employment-generating purposes to which the Chartered Institute of Housing refers.

Another important issue that has arisen in our debates, and on which the amendments touch, is that of the mis-selling of personal pensions. We all deplore such mis-selling, and we are all keen to see the matter resolved and proper compensation given as rapidly as possible. I wish the Economic Secretary every success in achieving that. However, private mis-selling cannot justify public mis-selling.

The essence of mis-selling is allowing people to purchase pensions or to invest in pensions without full or accurate information being available to them about the implications of their actions for their own circumstances. The Government have now changed the conditions under which people have invested, but they are so far refusing to give the relevant information, either generally, to the public at large, or specifically, via the insurance companies, about the impact of the ACT changes on the contributions that they need to make or on the pensions that they can expect to receive. The Government should ensure that such information is made available. If they do not, people may find themselves opted out of SERPS when they should be opted back in, or they may be tempted to opt out in future when they should not do so.

On 13 July this year, the financial section of *The Mail on Sunday* said:

> "Leading independent pensions expert Gareth Marr of Moores Marr Bradley says: 'We would advise anyone who is still contracted into SERPS to stay in because of the uncertainty now surrounding the returns that can be obtained on opted-out plans. We strongly advise those who have contracted out to get back in—unless the government increases the level of National Insurance rebates it gives them.'"

The newspaper also states:

> "Steven Cameron, pensions development manager at Scottish Equitable, hopes the government will raise NI rebates to stop a possible flood back into SERPS. He says: 'For many, the advantage of opting out of SERPS has been significantly reduced and for some it has vanished.'"

How can it be other than mis-selling to allow people to make decisions without that information?

If the Economic Secretary found any of the companies that she chooses to berate every month behaving in that fashion, would she criticise them? If they refused to give such information when selling a pension, would she put them at the top of her jawboning list, or would she say, "It all depends whether you are Government or private. If you're Government, you can do that sort of thing and I'll pat you on the back and praise you. If you are private, I will criticise and attack you"? I will happily give way to the Economic Secretary, who is a frequent intervener, if she would like to tell us whether she approves of such behaviour by private pension schemes.

Mrs. Liddell: I get the impression that the right hon. Gentleman thinks there is something wrong with the way in which the Government have tried to do something about pension mis-selling, but the point that he is making is spurious. The Government have gone to great lengths to ensure that people are aware of the implications for their long-term future of changes to their pensions. Indeed, had the right hon. Gentleman been in Committee, he would have heard the issue debated very fully. Perhaps it is because of the inadequacy of Conservative Members in Committee that the heavy guns have had to attend today's debate.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady should know that, by convention, neither the Chancellor nor the shadow Chancellor sits on the Committee, and that is why I was not on it. However, I was extremely proud of the role played by my team in the appallingly short time made available for proper consideration of the measure. Once again, the hon. Lady ignores the issue and is content to make party political points. Would she tolerate, let alone praise and advocate, the misinformation and lack of information that the Government are providing if the private sector companies that she seeks to regulate had behaved in such a way? If she is not prepared to answer such questions, we can only assume that she has dual standards on this matter, as on so much else.

Mrs. Liddell: I am happy to make it perfectly clear that the Government have gone to considerable lengths to ensure that information is available to those buying pensions. We discussed the matter fully in Committee and, quite frankly, as a member of a Government who for eight years ignored pensions mis-selling, it is no wonder that the right hon. Gentleman cannot look me in the eye when I am responding to him.

Mr. Lilley: To say that the Government are going to great lengths to make information available when they spent tens of thousands of pounds of public money producing a pocket Budget—

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): It cost £50,000.

Mr. Lilley: It cost the taxpayer £50,000, and its sole reference to this matter was an oblique reference to measures to promote long-term investment.

If the information is being made available outside the House, can it be made available inside the House? What will be the impact, for example, on a 30-year-old person who has been putting £100 a month into his or her pension scheme and who, as a result of the ACT changes, will have to reconsider the position?

The hon. Lady says that the information is being made available. Apparently, it was mysteriously made available in Committee, although none of my right hon. and hon. Friends who were present were aware of it. None of it is recorded in *Hansard*. Somehow the *Hansard* writer did not manage to get it down. Can she tell us the answer now? If she will not, I can tell the House about the

[Mr. Lilley]

calculation by the Association of Consulting Actuaries. If someone put £100 a month into a pension fund before, they will now have to put in £112. It is right that people should know the impact of the changes on their financial circumstances. It is monstrous that the Government are not providing the information.

I advise the Minister to follow the example of the Trades Union Congress, which has published a leaflet on "Pension power for women" suggesting that women do not have enough information on pensions and should have more. For example, one question in the leaflet is:

> "Is there is a scheme I can afford?"

After the ACT change, there probably is not. The leaflet offers help in answering such questions as:

> "I work part-time—Can I join my company scheme?"

The answer is, probably not. The answer may well be that it is not worth doing so now and it might be better to stay in SERPS. I am glad that the trade unions are taking over where the Government have failed to act and deliberately sought to leave people in the dark.

The impact of the change extends to the pension funds run by local authorities. The hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman), from his distinguished position, spelled out the overall impact that it will have on the 99 local authorities that belong to local government pension schemes. He wrote:

> "It has been estimated that the abolition of ACT would add at least 3 per cent. or £300 million to our employers' pension costs. No such increase could be afforded by local authorities without making further cuts to services to their local residents".

The alternative would be to increase the council tax, if they were allowed to do so.

Local authorities are beginning to do the calculations to find out how much it will cost their council tax payers in future if they are to ensure that their pension schemes are properly funded.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Does my right hon. Friend not find it extraordinary that, in a parliamentary written answer to me on 21 July, the Department of the Environment announced that the next actuarial revaluation for local authority pension schemes would not be until March 1998? Here we have the Government implementing a Budget measure with no idea whatever of the implications for public expenditure on local authorities. Does not my right hon. Friend find that extraordinary?

Mr. Lilley: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I seem to remember that the answer says something such as, "Not until then will the truth be known." Those words make it clear that, up to now, the truth has not been told by Government Front Benchers, and the facts have not been given, even to local authorities, about the impact of the cost of the measure on the pension funds and council tax.

Earlier today, I was in Uxbridge—not coincidentally, as there happens to be a by-election there in a couple of days. The Conservative party has a very good local candidate there, unlike the Labour party, which has parachuted in a career politician from outside the constituency. As a local candidate, he wanted to know the impact on Uxbridge people of the Budget and the pensions measure particularly. We were able to calculate that probably more than 7,000 people in Uxbridge alone have personal pensions. They, of course, will all wish to know how much extra they will have to put in if they are to receive the pension that they were previously expecting.

4 pm

The other night, I was being driven by a taxi driver. I did not ask whether he came from Uxbridge, but he may well have done. He said to me, "You are something to do with politics, aren't you?" I said, being very well known, "That sort of thing." He said that he had just been trying to persuade his father to tear up his Labour party membership card. When I asked why, he said that it was because of what the Budget had done to pensions. I thought that he put the point very pithily when he asked, "What is the point of us putting money into our pension funds if the Government are promptly taking it out?"

That is precisely what is happening. The amount of money that they are taking out is not so very different from the amount in rebates that the Government were previously putting in. It is a fair indication of how the Government see pension funds just as a source of revenue rather than as prudent provision by the self-employed and those in mobile employment for their future.

About 7,000 people in Uxbridge will be thinking, "Do I need to put in a full 25 per cent. extra, as will be required just to raise the dividend revenues if everything is in equities, or is the 12 per cent. calculated by the Association of Consulting Actuaries more like what will be required if I have a mix of different investments?"

Probably about 16,000 people in Uxbridge have occupational pensions. Their position will depend in part on whether their employers are prepared to put extra money into the schemes—in which case that money will not be available for investment, to pay wages or to enhance the firm's position—whether they will have to pay in the money, or whether their future pension rights will be downgraded as a result of the measure. They will have to decide whether their schemes will opt back into the state scheme. The scheme could decide that it is no longer worth being an opted-out scheme, and that it should opt back into SERPS.

We must consider what impact there will be on the council tax payer in Uxbridge. We understand that, just to pay the extra contributions required by the borough employees' pension fund if it is to offset the effect of the ACT changes, everyone in a band D house in Uxbridge will pay an extra £2 a month.

There are big impacts on ordinary people in ordinary places—and in important places such as Uxbridge. It is important that that information should be made available. We have tabled new clauses and amendments to try to ensure that more information is made available. If those do not succeed, we want the amendments that will protect pension funds for the next few years to receive the House's support.

The tax rise concerning pensions is the biggest unexpected tax rise that the Government have inflicted on us. They have done so in direct rejection of assurances given in opposition by hon. Members who now sit on the Treasury Bench. A Government who can do that, and enable it to be done by ramming the Bill through a truncated Committee, are a Government who are ashamed of their own actions—and they are right to be ashamed. We believe that they can partly ameliorate that by accepting our amendments.

Mr. Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I want to deal with the effect of the changes on investment, which was not covered at length in the Standing Committee, and which the House should deal with.

First, however, I congratulate the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) on his attitude to the mis-selling of private pensions. That mis-selling has been a tremendous scandal, and it is gratifying to hear the right hon. Gentleman admit it. I understood him to be congratulating my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on the work that she is doing to try to remedy the situation.

We have heard little about pensioners in general, either in Standing Committee or on Second Reading. For example, we did not hear that the number of active members of occupational pensions schemes has fallen radically since 1979, so that 12 million people in work do not now have access to a company pension. We did not hear about the fact that private pensions can represent very poor value for those on low or modest incomes.

We heard a great deal, however, about the catastrophic effect that the changes would have on pensions, especially private pensions. In response, I quote to the House the words of Anne Young of Scottish Widows. She thought that one could not put a figure on the impact, and I agree with her:

> "There are three main imponderables. The first is the attitude of companies who currently pay large dividends. The second is the effect the Chancellor's move will have on the valuation of shares, and the third is the attitude of pension fund managers".

When I consulted my borough treasurer about the impact on the Dudley pension scheme, he could not give me a direct answer. He said, rightly, that a range of imponderables had to be taken into account before the impact of the changes could be estimated.

Incidentally, the Chancellor has left the tax relief on private pensions entirely untouched. Eagle Star and other advisers on pensions have said that they doubt whether there will be any change in the extent to which people take out private pensions.

I intended to deal with the effect on investment. I mentioned the subject on Second Reading, so I will not go over the same ground again. However, I must make the point that, when the imputation system was introduced in 1973, most shareholders were basic-rate taxpayers. They did not receive tax credits, but they did not pay tax on the dividends that they received. That system was supposed to be neutral as between companies paying out in terms of distributions and companies retaining earnings to invest. However, a quarter of a century later, we are in a different world, in which most shares are held by institutions—pension funds, mainly.

The effect of the tax system on distributions, as opposed to retention, has ramifications for that change in the nature of shareholding. In theory, shareholders should be indifferent between dividends and capital gains. If dividends are not paid, the retention within the company should build up the company's strength, and the value of the shares will therefore be enhanced.

Of course, that is not now the case. Shareholders have different concerns. Some shareholders—those in venture capital enterprises, for example—want capital growth and are not so interested in dividends. Conversely, some shareholders want dividends, for a variety of reasons. They may be unsure about what managers will do with the retained earnings, and therefore want to get dividends out quickly.

Another factor in the choice between paying dividends and the retention of earnings is the tax system. It can be argued that higher-rate taxpayers favour retention because they have to pay tax, despite the tax credit. Conversely, it can be argued that pension funds favour distribution because of the tax credit on dividends they receive. That puts pressure on companies to pay out money in dividends rather than taking the long-term view.

We did not hear anything about that argument in the Standing Committee. We did not hear about many people's active concern about the extent to which companies pay out dividends rather than taking the long-term view to invest. I realise from the quizzical look on the face of the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) that he thinks that pension fund managers, if they get earnings, will use those distributions efficiently and will invest when the opportunity is worth while.

We say, however, that managers of enterprises should have greater scope to make the decision to invest than they have under the current system. We say that, at present, combined with other factors such as our market for corporate control, which we do not share with Germany and France, there is too much pressure to pay out dividends rather than for managers to use retained earnings to invest for the long term.

Mr. Shaun Woodward (Witney): Will the hon. Gentleman be kind enough to comment on a survey carried out by Merrill Lynch between 7 July and 9 July this year, after the Budget? The company questioned 56 UK institutions managing £775 billion and discovered that, in the wake of the Budget, sellers outnumbered buyers of UK equities by 18 points, the highest figure in a year. Can the hon. Gentleman explain why, if the scheme is so spectacularly successful, this rush selling has taken place?

Mr. Cranston: The hon. Gentleman anticipates me. In Standing Committee, the hon. Gentleman did not answer one question put to him by my hon. Friends. Yesterday, the hon. Gentleman could not answer one question.

On Second Reading, I said that there were distortions as a result of the system that the Finance Bill will change. There are distortions in terms of the investment decisions made by pension funds. I pointed out that the existing regime favoured pension funds purchasing UK equities rather than foreign equities. I also said that there is an argument that there is a distortion in terms of buying debt instruments. I acknowledge that one might say that it would be better if pension funds continued to buy UK equities. The point is, however, that there is a distortion, and, as a result of the change, that distortion will be removed.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Will not the result of the measure be that pension funds will switch to overseas equities? Will that benefit the UK economy?

Mr. Cranston: I made the point just now that pension fund managers might decide to buy foreign equities.

Mr. Gibb: Is that better?

Mr. Cranston: I am not commenting one way or the other. [*Laughter.*] Hon. Members may laugh. I thought that they believed in free market economics. The existing system has a distortion in it.

As I said at the outset, the other effect of the change is that earnings will be retained to a greater extent. In that sense, managers of UK companies can take a long-term view which will benefit the economy.

The widespread debate in the literature and among City analysts and others about the adverse effect of the existing system on long-term growth has passed Opposition Members by. They completely ignored it in Committee; they ignored the possibility of a flat-rate tax on pension funds that was discussed in the reports that they quoted in Committee; and they ignored the possibility of returning to the classic system of corporate tax, which operates in the United States. They were more interested in political rhetoric and in the notion of smash and grab. I do not blame them for that—it was a nice political point to make—but they have not addressed the fundamental issue of long-term investment. As a result of this change, there will be more long-term investment in this economy. I oppose the amendments.

4.15 pm

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): It may be a naive opinion for a new Member to express, but I hope that during the debate some minds may be changed and some opinions altered. I listened to the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) complaining about the lack of debating time. I suspect that, the more debating time we had, the more intransigent Members would become in their positions.

The amendment covers some serious issues. I did not serve on the Finance Bill Committee, but I have tried to intervene on this point before, and I am grateful for the opportunity to do so today. I have an interest in this debate, as, before my election, I was employed by Scottish Amicable, which is one of the principal financial institutions in Scotland and was recently taken over by the Prudential. My only continuing interest in that company is the welfare of the colleagues I left behind, as they face the challenges that that takeover will bring.

I also have an interest in that both the local authorities in my constituency area will be affected by the implications of additional contributions to pension funds that may be required as a result of these changes. As some hon. Members have said, that is unquantifiable at this stage, which is why I think that the Government have moved with such haste in introducing these changes and the proposals in the Finance Bill.

When I went to work at Scottish Amicable, I had experience in business development, but I had no experience of the life insurance and pension fund sector. I was struck by the fact that such companies never make decisions on the quality and strength of funds on a short-term basis: it is always on a long-term basis. Any factor that is away from the predictions—out of the ordinary or different—causes disruption to the long-term development of funds. It has an impact on actuarial calculations and on the position taken by officers on reserves for long-term distribution. Those are not day-to-day factors, but factors on which long-term judgments must be made. The scale of the change that the Government have undertaken disrupts the process of long-term financial management in the interests of those funds.

I was also struck by the importance that those companies give to the gearing of finance. The ability to transform small amounts of money into much more substantial sums is the art of actuarial science, and the art of investment management. Unless companies are given appropriate opportunities to pursue that essential part of their work without massively changing circumstances—which the proposals on tax credits constitute—many will face difficulties.

It would be easy for us to get caught up in an exchange of City anecdotes, but there are some simple truths about the proposed changes. Some people's—not everyone's—pension contributions will have to go up, and it is a myth to suggest that the tax will be easy or painless to raise.

The changes come on the back of the pensions mis-selling scandal. The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden was right to compliment the Economic Secretary on the energy that has been applied to the problem since the change of Government. I say that partly to encourage her to deal with my constituents' cases that I have forwarded to her.

It is welcome that the Government are taking such a strong line and pursuing the industry to guarantee that the wrongs are righted, but it is unfortunate that they have created an element of uncertainty about pensions as a result of the frenetic debate on the Finance Bill—some of which, I concede, has been fuelled by the Conservatives. Anything that creates uncertainty is unwelcome in the pensions industry and the community at large.

One of my constituents, a trustee of a pension fund of which the principal contributor went out of business, wrote to ask who will pay if additional contributions are required. Some pension funds will be in extremely difficult situations.

Last week, Standard Life, the largest mutual insurer in the United Kingdom, suspended offering transfer values for occupational pension schemes until it could calculate the full impact of the measures, and various other life insurance and pension companies have said similar things. In pensions, there can be no quick initiatives of which the outcome can confidently be predicted, as the Government seem to think; all changes cause some uncertainty and unease in the industry.

Let us consider the message that our debate will convey to the country. The debate has been rather impoverished of substance, and fuelled by a great deal of party political rhetoric that will not allay public unease. Anything that undermines the confidence that people are beginning to have to make appropriate contributions to their pension funds, whether primary or secondary, is damaging.

Pension contributions and funds in this country are more substantial per capita than elsewhere, but they are not perfect. Under the current regime, some people will still have to live on extremely low incomes in their retirement; anything that detracts from people's confidence to contribute to pension schemes is bad news indeed.

The last thing that the sector requires is more uncertainty. The previous Government presided over many notes of uncertainty, but for the new Government to compound those mistakes in the very first weeks of their term of office would be extremely regrettable.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Let me begin by taking issue with the hon. Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston), whose interesting speech displayed the real confusion and misunderstanding on the Labour Benches.

The hon. Gentleman said that the present advance corporation tax regime—the arrangement that exists now, before the Bill is enacted, which I hope it will not be—represented a distortion in the market. The opposite is the case. The aim of the imputation tax—I genuinely fear that many Labour Members, including Ministers, do not understand this properly—was to prevent a very serious distortion that would have been inequitable, and would also have had serious and damaging economic consequences. I refer to double taxation. The whole purpose of ACT is to avoid that, but the removal of the dividend tax credit reintroduces the notion.

It is not right for pension funds to be subject to taxation. Why? Because, when their proceeds are paid to pensioners, those pensioners pay tax on them. The clause will introduce double taxation: the income that is invested for pensioners will be subject to tax, and they will still pay tax on the proceeds.

Some countries operate a system that is the reverse of ours, under which pension funds are themselves subject to tax, but the pensioner receives his pension tax-free. That is one way of avoiding double taxation; we have a different but very effective way of avoiding it. The hon. Member for Dudley, North is supporting a measure that will reintroduce the concept of double taxation, with all that flows from it.

Mr. Cranston: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why the United States does not have our imputation system, and in what way the United Kingdom system is more advantageous than that in the United States? Can he also explain how the neutrality aspect differs as between higher-rate taxpayers, basic-rate taxpayers and pension funds that are tax-exempt?

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman has asked me a series of questions, many of which are irrelevant to the issue that we are discussing. I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you would rapidly halt me if I embarked on a disquisition about the American tax system. We are talking about the British tax system. As for the question of equity between basic-rate and higher-rate taxpayers—*[Interruption.]* I am endeavouring to answer the hon. Gentleman's questions. Labour Members obviously do not want me to answer their questions, but I shall answer them anyway, whether they want me to or not.

The equity between higher-rate and basic-rate taxpayers under an imputation system is entirely preserved. The basic-rate taxpayer incurs no further tax liability on his dividend, but the higher-rate taxpayer must account to the Inland Revenue for the difference between the standard rate and his own marginal rate—or the difference between the dividend tax credit rate and the higher marginal rate. That is perfectly simple. Equity is preserved, and the principle of double taxation is avoided.

If the clause is passed, however, double taxation will become a principle in our tax system. That is a retrogressive and damaging step, and the whole country should be in no doubt about what is happening.

The measure will affect not only institutional pension funds—which, rightly, we have been discussing today, and about which I shall say a little more shortly—but individuals. It produces another anomaly, in that individuals will be subject to double taxation. Individual taxpayers who should not be paying tax at all, because their incomes have not reached the taxable threshold, will now do so, under legislation introduced—amazingly—by a Labour Government.

The Labour party used to be proud of concepts of social justice, and proud of being committed to giving the less well-off a fair deal. What will happen now is that a little old widow with her half a dozen privatisation shares who previously could reclaim dividend tax credit and so not pay tax will no longer be able to do so. She will be subject to an invidious and new form of taxation, to which she or anyone below the tax threshold is currently not subject. That is extremely unfair. As well as destroying the neutrality of the system and introducing a distortion, the measure will cause pain and financial loss to those who least deserve to suffer.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Has it been my hon. Friend's experience, as it has been mine, that pensioner constituents who have been alerted to the change at this late stage in the passage of the Bill are beginning to write in to say that they had not appreciated the situation? Can he contemplate, as I can, the number of letters we will receive after the Bill has become law?

4.30 pm

Mr. Davies: I am going to give my right hon. Friend an honest answer, because we all try to give honest answers in this place. The honest answer, which I know is not the one he was hoping to hear, is no. There is a simple reason for that, and the reason is twofold. First—I know they will not mind my saying this—my constituents in Lincolnshire are probably not quite as financially sophisticated as my right hon. Friend's constituents in the Cities of London and Westminster. One would expect the City of London to contain exceptionally financially sophisticated people.

Secondly—I do not know whether or not this is a compliment, but it can be taken either way—the remarkable success of the Mandelson propaganda machine has been that it has still not become entirely apparent to the general public what will be the effect of the Budget, not only in the field we are discussing now but in many others. If the Labour Government want to regard that as a positive achievement, they can.

It is a remarkable achievement of propaganda that, in terms of the broad public perception of the initial debates on the Budget, the Government have managed to get away with saying that they have found a pot of gold that no one knew about—that magic holy grail, for which Chancellors of the Exchequer have looking for centuries, if not millennia, but have never found. It is the equivalent of the philosopher's stone—the tax that is not a tax at all; a source of money that can be tapped without doing damage to anyone else. The abolition of the dividend tax

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credit has been presented to the public as though no one would suffer from the extraction of £4 billion or £5 billion a year from those who currently benefit from the dividend tax credit—institutions such as pension funds as well as individuals.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) is correct. As Abraham Lincoln said:

"you cannot fool all the people all of the time."

I do not think the British people can be fooled for long, and I am certain that the people of Lincolnshire cannot be fooled for long, so to those who are manipulating that remarkable propaganda machine I say that the truth will come back and hit them—reality always wins in the end, and the truth will be victorious.

When people realise how they have been defrauded, not only by the tax, but by the way in which the tax has been presented, which compounds the offence, they will be extremely angry. We shall receive thousands of letters full of anguish and distress—not that we will be able to do much for the correspondents, many of whom will express sincere regret at having voted the wrong way on 1 May, not realising what costs would flow from that unfortunate and, in many cases, hasty decision.

That is just one aspect, and I have not by any means finished my strictures in support of the amendment to the Government's appalling clause. I have tried to show that, far from removing distortions from the tax system, the Bill is introducing for the first time some very onerous and unpleasant distortions into our tax system.

The other point which the hon. Member for Dudley, North made was also wrong. He said that the abolition of dividend tax credit would increase the retention rate of profits by companies. That, too, comes out of the Mandelson propaganda machine all too frequently, and it is complete and utter nonsense.

There are only two ways in which a company can be responsibly managed in terms of the distribution and level of profits. The first is the classic method taught in business schools around the world, which is to retain for investment such profits as can be invested in projects whose prospective yield will be equal to or higher than the average cost of capital of the company concerned. That rule has a certain mathematical rigour. It is not always easy to estimate profits from potential investment projects, but that is the science of investment appraisal, and it is what professional managers are supposed to do.

The second approach is also responsible. It supposes that company directors exist in a fiduciary capacity on behalf of their shareholders, and should therefore do whatever is in their shareholders' interests. If some other principle overrides the one that I have just outlined, they should be prepared to allow that to happen, at least in a certain measure. Where a large number of their shareholders—in this case, institutional pension funds—say to the company directors, "We absolutely depend on the maintenance of our dividend cash flows, our own beneficiaries are pensioners who depend on that, and we look to you as directors of our company to ensure that we are, as far as possible, protected from what the Government are doing", the directors may responsibly say that they need to maintain their distribution rate at a slightly higher level than would result from the objective application of the principle that I have set out.

Mr. Cranston: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why the ratio of dividends to GDP is higher in this country than in the United States?

Mr. Davies: It is probably a function of the structure of industry in the two countries. An awful lot of mistakes are made, such as comparing stock market performance, because the structure of industry in certain countries is not taken into account. In some industries, a higher pay-out ratio is clearly appropriate, because the opportunities for investment that achieve the criterion that I have just set out—yielding the same return as the average cost of the capital of a company—are less strong than in other sectors of the economy. However, I do not think for a moment that differential pay-out ratios have anything to do with the existence or otherwise of an imputation tax.

I thought that the hon. Gentleman had intervened to say that he found something wrong with my argument, but far from it. If he finds nothing wrong with it, that may be because he has already seen what inevitably and logically flows from it. In the first case, if companies adopt what I call the "professional principle" in determining their pay-out ratios, by definition the pay-out ratio will not change as a result of the abolition of the dividend tax credit. Thus, far from the Government's measure bringing about a higher retention ratio, the ratio will remain exactly the same.

The second possibility is that the pay-out ratio will increase because company directors will decide to increase it so that cash inflow to their gross pension funds will remain the same. The exact opposite will thus occur: the retention ratio will fall, and the pay-out ratio will rise. I hope that that shows that the assumption behind the hon. Gentleman's analysis was absolutely wrong.

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. Is not the logic of his point that it is up to companies to decide whether it is in their long-term interest to retain or distribute profits? The tax credit system we seek to abolish put a distortion into the system. It created a subsidy for the distribution of profits, and thereby removed the freedom of company boards to determine their long-term future.

Mr. Davies: I can tell the hon. Lady that I have sat on the boards of companies, and not for one moment would I have been influenced by that consideration. I would always have adopted the first principle, and I would adopt it now if I were on the board of a public company. I would say that we will determine the pay-out ratio on the basis that we pay out everything to our shareholders, except where we believe that we can reinvest at equivalent risk at equivalent returns—or, of course, at lower risk or better returns.

Beyond that, we have an absolute fiduciary responsibility to hand the money back to the shareholders to whom it belongs. They can then decide how to reinvest it themselves. I would leave tax distortions out of the matter.

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman makes my point for me. Companies are in the best position to judge what is the best way forward for them. He is arguing against—and, in so doing, making the case for—giving companies the right to determine their own future. That is not logical.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Lady has not been listening to me; she has been weaving a web of fantasy of her own. I said nothing of the kind. I said that there were two possible sets of consequences relating to the pay-out ratio. As a company director I would wish to operate on the basis that there would no change in the pay-out ratios of British companies as a result of the abolition of the dividend tax credit.

The hon. Lady implied that that was the basis on which good management would operate, and I agree with her. If she accepts that, she pulls the rug out from under the feet of the hon. Member for Dudley, North, who argued that one of the supposed benefits of the abolition of the dividend tax credit would be an increase in the retention ratio.

I suggested a second scenario, in which the company was being slightly less objectively and professionally managed. There, the effect of abolishing the dividend tax credit would be to increase the pay-out ratio in order to satisfy the demands of a majority of shareholders.

Yvette Cooper (Pontefract and Castleford): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there will be pressure from shareholders on the decisions that companies make, and that those shareholders in the form of pension funds will have an incentive to call for dividends to be paid to them, rather than their potential dividends going into the long-term future of the company and the increase in the value of that company over time?

Therefore, the distortion comes via the shareholders. Even if other board members are as far-sighted as the hon. Gentleman, the shareholders will put pressure on them to pay out now, rather than to hold the money in investment for the long-term future of the company.

Mr. Davies: It is typical of traditional Labour myopia about industry to see some antithesis between shareholders and companies. There is no antithesis at all. A company consists of nothing more or less than its shareholders. The members of the company are its shareholders. The board of directors is there only in a fiduciary capacity to manage the shareholders' money. There can be no antithesis or conflict arising between them in a properly managed company.

The rest of the hon. Lady's point supported my argument that the effect of the abolition of the dividend tax credit will be that some shareholders—the present gross funds, the institutional shareholders and the poor non-tax-paying individuals whom I mentioned earlier—will put pressure on companies to increase the pay-out ratio over what the board of directors would normally consider its responsibility to decide.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does my hon. Friend recall that, when there was a 5 per cent. reduction in the ACT credit, the consequence was that, in some cases, pension funds, which own many of the companies, required a higher distribution to compensate for the tax credit that they were no longer receiving? Will he confirm that he has observed the paradoxical element in the proposals, which may lead to a higher distribution, higher dividends and higher pay-outs from some of those companies? That goes against the Government's position that profits are better retained.

4.45 pm

Mr. Davies: I agree with my right hon. Friend. He touches on a minor but intriguing theme of the Budget. When the Labour party goes astray, it usually does so by compounding an initial error made by a previous Conservative Administration. It is true that previous Conservative Administrations made a few mistakes, otherwise I suppose that we should still have a Conservative Administration. The Government seem to have said in so many aspects of the Budget, "You sinned a little, so we will sin a great deal more."

If the Government had examined the consequences for company pay-out policy following the 5 per cent. reduction in ACT a few years ago, they would have seen that those consequences were exactly the opposite of those advanced by their propaganda machine and so ably represented in the debate by the hon. Member for Dudley, North.

It has taken some time to deal with the illusions betrayed by the hon. Member for Dudley, North, but I shall return to the essence of the clause and the need for the amendment. One hopes that, before the Treasury made such a disastrous proposal, it considered the consequences of abolishing a dividend tax credit. As we shall probably find later, when we discuss foreign income dividends, little consideration and no consultation took place. The Government must confront the damage that would be caused by the Bill, which was not anticipated and which gives rise to confusion and consternation.

As for the impact on pensions, one can distinguish five consequences that flow inevitably from the abolition of dividend tax credits. The first is that personal pensioners and those with defined-contribution, as opposed to defined-benefit, occupational pensions—there are millions of people in those two categories—will be significantly worse off.

It simply will not to do to say that, although those pensioners are worse off because of the abolition of dividend tax credit, they are better off because the stock market has done well over the past few months. That would be thoroughly hypocritical, because the Government have not the faintest intention of reintroducing the dividend tax credit if the stock market should cease to perform so strongly.

When we introduce tax measures, we must always consider the effect if other things remain equal. If this measure is implemented, those two categories of pensioners—millions of our fellow citizens—will be decisively worse off. We heard an estimate of 12 per cent., which more than justifies my saying significantly worse off. There is no escaping that fact.

The second category is the defined benefit occupational schemes—the traditional occupational schemes in this country. Again, money is being taken away from them. There is no doubt that someone will be worse off; who will it be? In so far as there is a surplus in those funds, some or all of which might have been allocated to pension benefits of one kind or another, clearly the pensioners in those schemes will be worse off.

In so far as those pension schemes go from an actuarial surplus to an actuarial deficit because of the necessary writing down in the prospective rate of return on the funds

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that every actuary will have to undertake, the companies that have established those defined benefit schemes will be worse off. Under the law, they will have to make additional contributions.

I complained about that on Second Reading. I said that it was quite irresponsible for the Government to introduce a proposal that will necessarily have a considerable impact on corporate post-tax profitability without making any estimate of the impact on the corporate sector: to what extent it will reduce corporate profits that are available for investment or distribution. Clearly, the effect will be more than significant—although we do not know whether it will run into many hundreds of millions or many billions of pounds a year.

It is particularly disingenuous of the Government not to make such an estimate when they make much of the fact that they have reduced the nominal rates of corporation tax in the Budget. It is all very well saying that they will reduce corporation tax by 2 per cent., but if not only the utilities, which are targeted in a discriminatory way and face a substantial increase in their corporate taxation, but other companies, which will have to make additional, unexpected and unbudgeted pension contributions, have a new levy imposed upon them, the net position will be a great deal worse. The net impact of the Budget on the corporate sector will be, without the slightest doubt, negative to the tune of several billions of pounds—although we do not know by how many.

I invite the Economic Secretary and the Paymaster General to intervene in order to give the House that figure. I shall gladly give way now. The hon. Gentleman merely smiles sheepishly: he has not the faintest intention of satisfying my curiosity. There are two reasons why he will not do that. First, he does not know the figure—in which case, he has not done his homework properly. It is a disgrace that the Treasury should advance proposals of that kind without conducting some elementary costing exercises. Secondly, he may know the figure, but he does not want to tell me. He knows how unpopular the news would be for British industry, which would read it in *Hansard* tomorrow morning—or perhaps the figure would be announced on the airwaves well before then, as I suspect it would be pretty sensational.

The more reticent, shifty and evasive the Government become every time I question them about this point, the more I am forced to conclude that they have something nasty to hide. If the figure is not calculated by the Government, it will be calculated in due course by analysts in the City and by the actuaries of the various pension funds involved. It will take many months to aggregate the calculations, but, when they are released, the 1997 Budget will be viewed as a grievous one that imposes substantial burdens on industry.

Despite all the rhetoric and the Mandelson propaganda about the Government's being friendly to business and wanting investment, their deeds totally belie their words. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) is correct: it is only a matter of time before the British people realise how badly they have been taken in, and then there will be political retribution for the guilty.

A third inevitable consequence of abolishing dividend tax credits and reducing the yield from pension savings will be fewer pension savings. That is an automatic consequence: if one reduces the yield from a particular investment, one reduces the volume of that investment. We shall have fewer pension savings, and no doubt fewer savings as a whole, in this country. I pointed out on Second Reading what a curious move that is at a time when the Government claim that the economy is overheating and when, logically, they should encourage, rather than penalise, savings. Considerable aggregate economic damage will flow from that action.

The fourth important consequence has been mentioned this afternoon. Some funded occupational pension schemes with defined benefits are in the public sector. Local authorities are a good example—civil servants are not, because they have a pay-as-you-go system. Public sector occupational pension schemes are funded, and therefore will lose the income that is currently represented by dividend tax credits. Some schemes will go into actuarial deficit, or surpluses—where they exist—will decline.

In the course of debate, some pretty frightening estimates have been given of the extent to which local authorities will have to use council tax payers' money—which would otherwise be used for service provision or debt reduction, in the case of Conservative authorities; I do not think that Labour authorities advocate debt reduction programmes—to make up the solvency of the pension schemes. That automatic increase in public expenditure must be set against the gains in public expenditure as a result of abolishing dividend tax credits.

Yet we have seen no net figure. It is simply not satisfactory to come to the House with a gross figure for tax yield and not tell us the net figure for the necessary losses in revenue or increases in public expenditure that will flow from the same measure. That is a thoroughly unprofessional, unsatisfactory and shoddy thing to do, and it is simply not good enough.

Mr. Brooke: I am extremely appreciative of my hon. Friend for giving way again. Does he recall that, when the matter was raised with the Prime Minister on the Floor of the House, he absolutely deflected the question, and said that the problem would be solved by the behaviour of the stock market?

Mr. Davies: Evasiveness is clearly the hallmark of this Administration, and the Prime Minister's colleagues have followed his example. Perhaps we should allow them some moral mitigation—after all, their leader should bear primary responsibility for the tone he establishes in running the Government. On this and other subjects, that tone has been complete evasiveness, as my right hon. Friend has said. That is an extremely worrying state of affairs.

The fifth consequence of abolishing dividend tax credits also affects public expenditure—but, again, we have absolutely no estimate of its impact. Clearly, all investment decisions are taken at the margin, and the return from potential investment in personal pensions has been reduced significantly.

Therefore, it follows that many people who, on the basis of the previous equation, would have opted out of SERPS and into a personal pension scheme, will now not do so. There is much evidence that responsible advisers are warning people not to do that. That will impose a greater burden on SERPS as fewer people will opt out, and therefore future public expenditure projections must be revised upwards. However, we do not know by how much.

Several judgmental assumptions must necessarily be made in this case. When the Paymaster General was the manager of Jaguar, I am sure that he did not allow his finance director, the treasury department or accountants to bring forward budgets without stating their assumptions and calculating the consequences of a particular line of expenditure on a net basis. I am convinced that he did not allow that. Will he intervene now and say that he did? I am sure that he demanded to see the net position. If the net position then had to be calculated on the basis of judgmental assumptions, I presume that he would have demanded to know what they were.

I think that the Paymaster General was a more successful business man than he is a politician, so he would have queried those assumptions. I am sure that he looked hard at the methodology, and insisted that the job be done properly. He may have said, "I won't employ in Jaguar people who do not do that." However, the hon. Gentleman apparently employs in the Treasury many people who have not even begun to do that work—or perhaps they have done the work and we have not been told the results.

There is no third, fourth or fifth possibility; it is one of two: either they have not done the job properly—they have not done their basic homework—or they are being less than frank with the public. That fundamental issue runs through the Bill, but nowhere does it pose itself more acutely and more pertinently than in this clause.

I hope that we now finally receive an answer, from whichever Minister winds up the debate, to that essential question. Which is it: do Ministers not know what the net position is—do they not know what the consequences are of the increases in public expenditure or of the reductions in public revenue that will flow from the clause, set against the potential gains from the dividend tax credit? If they do know, why do they not tell us, and when will they tell us?

5 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I cannot aspire to the comprehensive, indeed heroic, coverage of the landscape of the clause that my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) has just achieved, but it is important for the House to consider a few more points as to the inadequacies of the clause and the necessity for the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory).

The discussion of the behavioural effects of the proposed change to dividend tax credits has been particularly interesting. Behind much of the Government's argument and, in some cases, behind some of the points made by my right hon. and hon. Friends, is the assumption that the Government, through the clause, may be able to change the way in which companies distribute their profits. The point was made most starkly and most instructively by the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), who said, more or less, that all dividend payments were bad, that if shareholders demanded extra dividend payments they were likely to fritter them away and that it was therefore extremely important for the Government to try to direct dividend payments in socially responsible ways, such as towards investment.

That was instructive in two ways. First, it showed a catastrophically fundamental lack of knowledge of and sympathy with any free-market system, in which the interflow of the needs of investors, companies and different classes of shareholder means that investment goes into the most productive sectors. If history, particularly the UK's history in the past 30 years, teaches us anything, it is that attempts by government to micro-manage the economy to the extent of, for instance, managing flows of dividends always end in disaster.

Secondly, even beyond that misunderstanding, there was a more important misunderstanding: that by cutting companies' incentive to distribute dividends—by changing the ACT rules in this case—we will produce greater investment and greater research and development.

Mr. Gibb: Would the Government have bothered to deal with this so-called distortion so early in their term if it were not for the fact that it just happened to raise £5 billion a year as a helpful by-product?

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend makes an extremely pertinent point. The answer to his question is no, of course not. If the Government's proposal directed investment—which they clearly wish to do—but did not raise any money, they would not have introduced it in this emergency Budget. Clearly the fact that dare not speak its name about this tax increase is that the Government were desperate for revenue and took this route because they thought that it was so technical and directly affected so few people that they would get away with it.

During the debates both upstairs in Committee and on the Floor of the House, the Government have not got away with it. Those involved—the industries, the pension funds and, perhaps most important, the many millions of pensioners who will be affected by the proposal—are beginning to realise what kind of raid this is on their pension funds. When they extract the £5 billion from those pension funds, the Government will notice that pensioners rebel and condemn the clause as much as we do.

To return to the direct point about whether this tax grab will have any beneficial effect on the flow of funds in British industry, upstairs, we discussed various academic studies that show that what might be regarded as the populist, intuitive line—that, if we make dividends less attractive, companies will put more of their money into productive, long-term investment—is simply not borne out by any evidence.

All the evidence shows that the companies that devote most effort to research and development are in particular sectors—pharmaceuticals, health care, engineering and electronics—that those companies do not have any particular dividend policy, and that, if there is any link between dividend distribution and investment in research and development, it is that they go together, which is intuitively plausible as well as being true. Companies that invest for the long term are, over the long term, more profitable. They require capital to continue the flow of investment and the flow of profits. Therefore, they need to keep their shareholders happy, so they have generous dividend payments.

The basic rationale behind the Government's stated desire—the fig leaf that they use to try to disguise the fact that this is simply a tax grab—is itself wrong. There is no rationale that says that, if we reduce the desirability of paying out profits in dividends, we increase the amount

[Mr. Green]

of money that goes into research and development; so, even on the Government's own rationale, the clause has no merit.

If the Government were genuinely interested in the rationale that they state for the clause, they would no doubt give tax credits for research and development. A general principle of Conservative Members—and of the previous Government—is that we want a simpler tax system that reduces corporation tax levels and does not have distortions such as tax credits. In other parts of the Budget, the Government have already shown that, where it suits them, they do not follow that regime. They say that various parts of Bill reduce taxes such as corporation tax and try to simplify the tax system, but when it suits them—as with the film industry—they are happy to introduce tax distortions that they regard as beneficial, so if they were really concerned about research and development they could introduce tax credits.

Mr. Quentin Davies: While my hon. Friend is on the matter of distortions and pay-out ratios, does he agree that it is damaging for an economy to force companies to retain an excessive rate of profit? If an excessive amount were retained in companies that happened to be generating a lot of cash, not only would it disadvantage their shareholders for reasons that I explained in my speech, but the mobility of capital in the economy as a whole would be reduced and less capital would be available for other parts of the company where growth and investment prospects might be better. It would be an extremely ineffective and unproductive economic mechanism.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend is right. The underlying point is that businesses and the people who run them know, by and large, where they should be investing. History tells us that, when politicians and civil servants, however well intentioned, try to interfere in the investment policies of individual businesses, they always get it wrong and make businesses worse off in the long term.

There is another part to the argument. Many of my hon. Friends have shown that the tax change is damaging to industry, but more important is the effect that it will have on pensioners. Does it help any pensioner? No. Does it damage many pensioners? Yes. Certain classes of pensioner, particularly vulnerable and future pensioners, will be particularly hit.

Another fig leaf that the Government produced when they introduced the clause was that many pension funds were in surplus, so it did not matter. That betrays a morality which, in itself, is extremely questionable. When Mr. Maxwell decided that surplus pension funds were suitable to be raided for his own purposes, many people rightly found that morally unacceptable. I fail to see the distinction between that and the Government deciding that surplus pension funds are there to be raided. Moreover, while some pension funds are in surplus, many are not, and they will need to find the extra money to increase the pensions available to future generations of pensioners or pay out lower pensions.

Some classes of business that are important for future job creation, such as small firms, will be particularly hard hit by the measure. In addition, underlying businesses will be affected. Many of them may well take a responsible long-term view about how they should treat their employees. They might say that their employees should not be disadvantaged by the Government's rather immoral one-off raid on pension funds. If, as a result, they decide to increase the contribution from the underlying business to the pension fund, the net effect will be that, again, investment and dividend payments are reduced. The firm concerned will be forced to do things with its capital that it would not otherwise do and the overall net wealth of the economy will, in the long term, be reduced.

Mr. Gibb: Is my hon. Friend aware of another consequence of trying to confiscate surpluses from the nation's pension funds, which is that many vulnerable pensioners receive a discretionary increase from those pension funds in the payment of their pensions because those pension funds are in surplus, but once those surpluses are eliminated there will be far less scope for such discretionary increases to the more vulnerable pensioners in Britain?

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend makes a good point. A point that I would develop from that is that whether any individual pensioner is particularly hard hit will be arbitrary. It will probably be no consequence of any action taken by the individual pensioner whether he is with a pension fund that is in surplus or in deficit, or whether that pension fund is associated with an underlying company that is or is not able to make up the deficit or is in a position to pay discretionary payments. Because of the arbitrary imposition of the tax, pensioners or future pensioners will suddenly find themselves severely disadvantaged.

Another point that I want to draw to the attention of the House is the long-term nature of savings for pensions. For most people involved, this hit will come halfway through the process of saving for their pension in old age. Because this measure changes the terms they thought they were saving under, it is effectively retrospective legislation. People may have been saving for 15 or 20 years under a certain set of rules. This measure changes those rules, dating back to the time when a person started to save for a pension. I hope that all hon. Members will agree that retrospective financial legislation is a bad thing.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend touches on an important point. Is not the measure a total misrepresentation, particularly to pensioners who are drawing nearer to retirement who have built up their expectations of their standard of living on a certain pension who will now be denied that level of benefit? They have no time left in their working life to make up the shortfall.

Mr. Green: That is an extremely good point, and it illustrates the amount of extra uncertainty that is injected into the system. The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney) referred to the fact that, from his experience in the pension industry, the worst that can happen for those running the industry and, more important, for those looking forward to receiving a pension, is an increase in uncertainty. Uncertainty is precisely what this tax increase introduces into the system.

Another effect of the measure is flatly contradictory to much of the rhetoric that we hear from the Government Front Bench, particularly the reforms favoured by the

Minister for Welfare Reform, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). He believes that there should be greater personal responsibility for savings and he wants the welfare state to move more towards the application of personal savings.

One definite effect of the clause, because of the uncertainty that it introduces, is that people will be discouraged from taking that route; they will want to take what they regard as a safer route. If at any time a Government can come along and take £5 billion out of the pension fund industry and possibly damage personal pensions, people will feel more reluctant than they were before to go down the route of personal savings to provide for themselves in old age or in times of illness or unemployment.

5.15 pm

What is proposed shows the enormous gap between rhetoric and reality in the Government. We hear a lot of rhetoric about an increase in personal responsibility and modernising the welfare state, but a couple of weeks after taking power the Government introduced an emergency Budget that marches strongly in the opposite direction. The Government have failed to come up with any rationale in terms of their own rhetoric on welfare for taking this action.

Companies will be badly affected by this measure, particularly small companies and companies that take the honourable route of trying to subsidise their own pension funds. Existing pensioners will be worse off, and future pensioners will be more uncertain about the life that they will be able to live in their old age. This is a thoroughly bad clause which at the very least needs amending.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): As a new boy, I might be forgiven for feeling rather frustrated. For 26 hours, members of the Finance Bill Standing Committee went through the Bill clause by clause. My hon. Friends may have felt during those 26 hours that we had strayed on to the set of "The Woodentops", such was the level of debate not forthcoming from the Government Benches.

I was almost encouraged that some of those mutes appeared to have found their voices today. Alas, the one who did find his voice—the hon. Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston)—appears swiftly to have disappeared. I can only hope that the reason for his disappearance is the former of two probabilities—the first, that he has gone to the Library to check some of his facts, which have been found to be sorely lacking or, secondly, that his pager has summoned him to Mandelson towers, whither he has hurried hotfoot, quickly shoving a copy of the Order Paper down the back of his trousers to mitigate the consequences of speaking out of turn.

Particularly galling is the fact that the hon. Member for Dudley, North, the only one to venture any opinions on the matter, has completely and utterly—either by choice or out of ignorance—misunderstood and ignored what we spent much of those 26 hours upstairs debating in fine detail. For his benefit, in case he reads *Hansard* tomorrow, and those few of his colleagues who have bothered to turn up, I want to go through, step by step, the serious implications of these clauses to a deep stratum of companies, pension funds and individuals.

Last week, I drew on the example of a large FTSE company, one of the largest employers in my constituency, SmithKline Beecham. Despite being a large multinational company, typically its pension fund was only about 93 per cent. covered at its last actuarial valuation. We know that, from an actuarial valuation basis, if the ACT credits are lost, the fund will be severely less fully funded than it currently is, but what are the options for the trustees of a pension fund such as that of SmithKline Beecham?

First, it can have a much less well funded pension fund and in due course be hauled up under the minimum funding requirements. Secondly, it could choose, if it is feeling generous towards its pension holders, to stump up the difference and underwrite the shortfall that will be exacerbated by the Government's moves. The cash injection required to do that will amount to approximately 7.5 per cent. of last year's pre-tax profits. That is not a good way to go about maximising funds for investment, something about which we heard so much from the hon. Member for Dudley, North.

What will this mean for SmithKline Beecham? To enhance shareholder value, it will probably have to launch a share buy-back programme, for which it will have to borrow money when interest rates are rising. That does not leave a great deal of extra money for investment, which is so important. It will have less money to pay out in dividends—which Labour Members apparently so resent. It will have less money for research and development, which is also important. Labour Members refuse to contemplate introducing a tax credit against research and development expenditure, as operates with varying degrees of success in France and the United States. It will have less money for expansion. I cannot envisage any way in which the Bill will increase the opportunities for that company to improve on its already enormous research and development expenditure.

The problem will be compounded by any tightening of the minimum funding requirements that the Government may introduce. Although that may not apply to SmithKline Beecham, there are less scrupulous smaller companies with pension funds that may put pressure on their actuaries so that there is a less stringent requirement to top up the pension fund, which may then mask the real nature of those funds. Less scrupulous pension fund managers may switch their pensioners out of defined benefit schemes into money purchase options, which are then open to the vagaries of the stock market and the underlying investments in the schemes.

The proposals will have especially harmful effects on many large, previously nationalised—or still nationalised—companies, all of which operate in Labour-held constituencies. As I have said, the old National Coal Board pension fund is worth a whopping £20 billion and looks after 500,000 former miners. It does not attract new funds, but it still has a great deal to pay out from a diminishing pot of money. The same goes, to a lesser extent, for the Post Office, with a £12 billion fund and 350,000 employees and former employees; for the steel industry; and for many formerly large engineering companies. The pension funds of all those companies will suffer.

Let us consider the impact on dividend payouts. SmithKline Beecham had a 15.9p full-year dividend last year. What options are open to it now? It could pay a reduced dividend to its shareholders. Because it will not get the advance corporation tax credit, the impact will fall on its shareholders, who will receive a dividend worth 20 per cent. less. That is certainly true for pension funds now and for individual shareholders from 1999. Its own

[Mr. Tim Loughton]

pension fund will suffer as it understandably holds a large number of SmithKline Beecham shares, within the limits allowed. It will be a double whammy.

Shareholders will suffer immediately and investors will be less attracted to the equity issue, so the cost of capital to borrow goes up, which means equity finance is more expensive, which again affects the capacity of those companies to expand and spend more money on research and development and investing overseas. As raising capital is a speciality of the City of London, it will be a loser under the proposed measures.

SmithKline Beecham may feel generous. It may feel able to pay out that 20 per cent. lost ACT credit in a higher net dividend to its shareholders. It would be exceedingly generous of that company to do so, but the effect would be less money in the pot for the important investment that the Labour party goes on about—so yet again, the measures are self-defeating.

What about the impact on individuals? I have already said that people with occupational pension schemes who rely on money purchase arrangements where companies are not making up the difference will be instant victims. Private pensions, which are unlikely to be in surplus, such is the nature of those schemes, will be hit to the tune of 11 per cent. The Association of Consulting Actuaries calculates that about half of final salary schemes will be in deficit and individual schemes will be hit as well. The implication is that pensions will be worth less at a time when the Government have just issued a new basis for encouraging further private pension provision.

The right hand of the Treasury appears not to know—or chooses to ignore—what the left hand of the Social Security Department is doing. Again, it will be self-defeating. Last week, we heard in detail about the implications for the investment trust and unit trust industry. Holders of those investments will be doubly hit by the changes.

The upshot is that the measures will undermine individuals' ability to retire early. They will undermine the great cliché of the flexible decade of retirement that we were promised by Labour before the election. Individuals with private pension schemes who already contribute the maximum are given no option to contribute more to make up the ACT shortfall. There have been no changes to the limits. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) said, there will be a serious impact as people will no longer be incentivised to contract out of the state earnings-related pension scheme and may indeed now contract back in.

There will be an impact on local authority pension schemes. We have had some mixed messages from Labour Members on that issue. My local authority, West Sussex county council, has already estimated that lost ACT credit is likely to cost it £3.4 million. Half of that will be down to the county council; half will be down to the district councils in West Sussex. It comes to about 5 per cent. of the annual payroll for West Sussex. We have received no assurances that that shortfall will be made up.

I want briefly to read from a letter from Sir Jeremy Beecham, the chairman of the Local Government Association, to the leader of West Sussex county council. He said:

> "I am pleased to be able to report that the Association correctly anticipated the Chancellor's announcement"—

very good Mystic Meg qualities; he obviously gets the *Financial Times* well in advance of most hon. Members—

> "and had made representations to the Government about the adverse impact on local authority pension funds in advance of the Budget.
>
> The Government has accepted that the loss of tax credits will need to be taken into account in determining local authority provision for 1999/2000 and subsequent years. We are, however, continuing to press the Government on this point and are asking for the increase to be fully underwritten by an increase in TSS and Government grant from 1999/2000 when the results of the next revaluation are implemented."

However, when the chairman of the UKSC, now the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman), claimed it as a great triumph that local authorities would be underwritten for any shortfall of ACT credits, there was a great deal on squirming on the Government Front Bench and the assurance was not repeated. We have been given no firm commitment by the Government, upstairs, downstairs on in any lady's chamber, that the shortfall will be underwritten. We know that the result can only be increased council taxes, which also depend on what the Government do on capping, or further cuts in local authority services.

Mr. Gibb: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is astonishing that the Red Book takes into account the extra pension contributions that companies will be required to pay because of the measure—it is stated on page 46 that there will be a consequent reduction in corporation tax—but that it makes absolutely no provision for the extra contributions that local authorities will have to pay so that they can balance their pension funds?

5.30 pm

Mr. Loughton: Of course it is astonishing—but then everything that Ministers have loosely said about their intentions to deal with local government pension funds has been quite astonishing. We have heard that the full implications for local authority pension funds will not really be known until next year, but—as any reasonable, responsible council leader or local authority pension fund trustee will say—it is prudent for all local authorities to have as soon as possible an ad hoc valuation of the very real damage that will be done.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is my hon. Friend aware that not only is it desirable to make up those contributions but the prescriptions governing rules of local government pension funds require trustees to make an informal valuation each year? If they feel that there is a shortfall, they must make it up each year—not when the next actuarial valuation is due.

Mr. Loughton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Ministers' sense of urgency in the matter has been positively snail-like and quite disgraceful. Yet again, local authorities have been left on their own to assess ways of making up the damage. The Government have left local government in a disgraceful position.

On a related subject, I have a copy of a letter from the Minister for Local Government and Housing to the hon. Member for Putney in which she wrote:

> "We spoke briefly last night about the impact of the Budget on local authority pension funds.
>
> Pension funds should benefit from improved company performance as a result of encouraging quality long term investment, reflected in long term share values. The reduction in Corporation Tax announced yesterday will greatly assist company performance."

In my experience in dealing in investment matters, every promise of investment performance had to contain the qualification that past performance should not be taken as a guarantee of future performance or gains. The Minister for Local Government and Housing, however, apparently takes stock market gains for granted and holds the sentiment, "Don't worry about what we have done, boys, because any shortfalls will be compensated by our great friends in the City—new Labour, new stockbrokers. Our great friends at the temple of Mammon—the stock market—will bail us out."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) asked, however, will the Government reverse their decision when the stock market starts going down? In Committee, I elaborated on the fact that the UK stock market rise has been something of a mirage compared with the much greater rises in other major markets, and that that has had a particularly significant impact on multinational companies, the share prices of which, in many cases, have fallen alarmingly.

The Government's measures will have a serious impact in four spheres—resulting in a quadruple whammy for companies and their company pensions funds, for beneficiaries of those pension funds, for ordinary people with private pension funds, and, inevitably, for anyone who pays council tax. It is entirely fallacious to suggest that dividend payment levels have positively discouraged investment, because those levels and investment are not mutually exclusive. I have already mentioned how a comprehensive study has shown that, in the vast majority of the past 18 years, dividend payments rose as investment rose.

Let us leave the final word to the former chairman of a major quoted engineering technology company. On the first page of the company's report and accounts for last year, the second strategic objective was described as achieving

"sustained growth in dividends per share."

In his report, the chairman was quite proud to report a dividend rate increase of 15 per cent. over the previous year, when he was able also to increase investment in the company by well over the 15 per cent. dividend increase rate.

The chairman believes that dividend payments and investment are not mutually exclusive, and that dividend payments are a major incentive for equity finance—which is one of the cheapest and most cost-effective ways of producing funds for expansion and research and development—and I believe him. I trust that his colleagues on the Labour Benches will believe him also, because that former chairman of TransTec plc is now the Paymaster General. It is a shame that he is not in the Chamber to echo the words that he wrote only a few months ago in his own company's report and accounts. I hope that one of the few Labour Members remaining in the Chamber for this debate might pick him up on those points.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The change to advance corporation tax amounts to an income tax of 20 per cent. on pension schemes that hold equities. ACT is paid because the taxpayer suffers an income tax rebate of 20 per cent., which is collected by a corporation on behalf of the Treasury. The tax change is therefore a severe raid on people's pension funds.

I shall dwell on the effects of the change on local authority pension funds. As I said in an intervention on the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), on 21 June 1997 I received a written answer from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions stating that the next actuarial valuation for local government pension funds would be in March 1988. The Government therefore included the measure in the Budget, although they had no idea—if they did, perhaps the Minister will tell us—of the precise costs and implications for local government.

Various calculations have been made of the measure's costs to local government, the most accurate of which is perhaps that provided by the chief executive of the London Pension Fund Association—who, as a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, is a professional in the field. He has calculated that the combined cost to local authorities will be £200 million to £400 million. The effect for most local authorities, including mine, will be increases in council tax bills of between £10 and £12.

Mr. Richard Cockcroft, whose current title is director of corporate services for Gloucestershire county council—it is a job to keep up with his title, because he keeps giving himself new jobs—has made the point that the next actuarial valuations will be made in March 1998. He states that an informal survey was conducted on behalf of the United Kingdom steering committee, which showed

"that the average County Council was less than 90 per cent. funded".

Therefore—far from being one of the 50,000 companies with a pension fund surplus mentioned by the Chancellor of the Exchequer—the local authority sector is in deficit and must quickly make up the shortfall.

Richard Cockcroft goes on to say that, even before the Budget measures, Gloucestershire county council was

"already contributing an additional £1m a year to rectify the situation, with the fund's other employers"—

the district councils—

"also having to contribute significant extra amounts."

He states that preliminary discussions showed that actuarial costs for the county council would be

"at least another £2m a year, with the District Councils in total being faced with similar additional costs."

Moreover, he states—as I said in an intervention on the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton)—that the

"Regulations governing Local Government Scheme require all 'actuarial deficits' to be made good by the employer."

Mr. Cockcroft continues:

"Without some form of assistance, I can see no option but for those additional pension contributions being made at the expense of 'front line' services."

He states that, alternatively, council taxes could be increased. A third option, of course, would be to increase local authority standard spending assessments.

This is a serious matter, because the Government announced in the Budget that they would stick to the previous Government's targets for the next two years. If they do so, it means that there will be no extra money for local authorities to meet their additional burdens. Local authorities will therefore have to bear those burdens themselves. If, as they said the other day, the Government are going to apply strict capping criteria and not allow council taxes to be increased above very tight limits,

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

the extra contributions will have to come straight out of the money for front-line services. I hope that council tax payers and the recipients of such services across the country will be made aware that their services will deteriorate solely because the Government have introduced this new measure.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): I suggest that the position is in fact even worse than my hon. Friend describes. Given the change in the forecast for inflation, it is estimated that there is a cut of between 1 and 2 per cent. in real terms in the amount of central Government grant to local authorities. That is estimated to be a cut of about £570 million this year, and double that the following year. Is not the position therefore rather more grievous for local authorities than my hon. Friend described?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that important point. It is all very well to stick to an expenditure programme in nominal terms, but in real terms—after inflation has been taken into account—the situation is in fact far worse. I suspect that that is why the format of the Red Book was changed this year so that it does not include departmental spending totals, as that makes it easier to work out what the shortfall is next year and, indeed, the year after. The effect will be the same in other Departments that have to make up shortfalls in pension contributions to pension schemes within their remit. Those Departments include, for example, the Department of Health.

While I am on the subject, it is worth pointing out that there is a local authority pension time bomb. There are many completely unfunded local government pension schemes. For example, firemen have no funded scheme at all—not that the change which we are discussing will affect them—but in view of the demographic changes and the fact that people are living longer, each departmental budget is being increasingly stretched to make up an ever greater shortfall in pension funds each year. The Government will have to take that into account.

We shall have to wait and see, but this measure may well depress by up to 20 per cent. the value of the equities held by pension funds. I hope that that does not happen, because it would be very serious for many pension funds. Should it happen, it has been calculated that the capital value of pension funds would fall by about 11 per cent. which, I believe, pension fund trustees would be required to make up in the first year. Some employer and employee contributions will therefore have to increase steeply this coming year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) mentioned the effect on different types of pension scheme. The objective of a defined pension scheme is to ensure that the pensioner receives a defined benefit when he retires. If he suddenly finds that the performance of his fund is 20 per cent. less than expected, he has two options: he can either accept a 20 per cent. diminution in the value of his fund at the time of retirement or, over a period, make up the shortfall in his contributions.

As I mentioned in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), that is all very well for us youngsters, because we have plenty of time to make up any shortfall. However, someone who is within three or four years of retirement—this is true of many of my constituents, because I live in an area which has an elderly population—has virtually no opportunity to make up such a shortfall, because he will not earn enough to do so before his retirement. He will therefore retire on a false prospectus. Such pensioners have reason to feel aggrieved about the Government's proposal.

5.45 pm

Of course, the effects depend on the balance of the individual fund. I must make it clear that what happens depends on how the individual fund is structured—the proportion of its investments in equities and the proportion in other fixed or variable interest-bearing stocks. I suspect that one of the effects of the proposal will be to force pension fund trustees to consider other interest-bearing fund stocks—for example, gilt-edged stocks—and increase the proportion of such stocks in their funds. Over time, I suspect that that will mean that the performance of such funds will not be as good as it would have been had they continued to invest the norm of 55 per cent. of their funds in equities.

Whether institutional investors require companies to pay out their increased dividends to make up the 20 per cent. shortfall or retain the money in their company retained profits, the effect will be distorting. A simple switch out of the equity market of a proportion of the pension funds sounds fairly innocuous, but the Government should bear in mind the combined value of the pension funds—a switch of that nature over a relatively short period could cause a dramatic downturn on the equity market.

I deal finally with a matter that has not yet been mentioned—the combined effect of the ACT credit withdrawals and the changes to foreign income dividends proposed for 1999. In 1993, Norman Lamont, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, introduced the foreign dividend scheme to enable companies with large earnings on their foreign trading activities to mop up the surplus ACT on those dividends. To the extent that they were able to pay out foreign income dividends, they could mop up the surplus, but, should they not be able to pay out FIDs in future as a result of a measure that we shall debate later this evening, companies would find that they could not reclaim the surplus ACT that they had paid to the Treasury. That is monstrous.

As I explained at the outset, ACT is paid because the individual taxpayer is getting tax credit on his income. To the extent that the Exchequer is gaining from surplus ACT—more ACT than the income tax credit paid—it is monstrous that companies are not able to reclaim the surplus. I hope that, when we debate foreign income dividends, that point will be highlighted.

I believe that the Government are seriously rethinking how they will operate the foreign income dividend scheme. I hope that, when further amendments are tabled, perhaps in the other place, the Government will consider the serious effect on some companies that we wish to encourage to make a profit and to repatriate that profit. It would be bizarre if companies were discouraged from repatriating their profits or, indeed, even encouraged to demerge their foreign subsidiaries or if the foreign subsidiaries were taken over by a foreign concern which could then remit the money into this country but not suffer tax damage as a consequence. That would indeed be a bizarre and perverse consequence of the proposed changes.

The ACT proposal is the most far-reaching measure in the Budget. To take some £5.5 billion from the pensions and hard-earned savings of the poorest people in this country is a cruel deception. Most people are not able to understand this highly complex tax, but they will understand when they suddenly find their standard of living and their income reduced. I hope that, when they realise that, they will protest loudly against the changes that the Government have introduced. I have no doubt that that will hasten the demise of the Government and the return of a Conservative Government at the next election.

Mrs. Liddell: I must confess that, during the two hours or so that we have spent discussing the amendments, an irritating refrain has been going through my head. It is an old song and I hope that the Library will be able to remind me of its words. It goes something like, "I think I may have heard this song before."

In the past couple of hours, we have heard the same speeches to which we listened in Committee, not once, not twice, but on a number of occasions. However, we missed the presence of the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell). We send our good wishes to his mother, about whom we heard a great deal in Committee. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) told us at great length about the pleasures of English wine. His constituents may find that extremely interesting, but mine are more concerned about a secure future for the economy.

I found it interesting that the shadow Chancellor opened the debate today. He made much of the fact that, by convention, the Chancellor and the shadow Chancellor do not sit on Committees considering the Finance Bill. He is correct in that. I wonder how much of a precedent it is to field the shadow Chancellor against a junior Treasury Minister. That shows that the right hon. Gentleman has a lack of confidence in his own troops. He still has not answered the point that was made repeatedly in Committee: why, if ACT is so important, did the previous Conservative Government change it?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Lady makes a political point as to why my right hon. Friend did not address the Committee. He gave her a perfectly cogent answer. However, he has appeared here today: are we entitled to ask when the Chancellor of the Exchequer might take part in our proceedings?

Mrs. Liddell: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is currently engaged in other Government business. I take it as a great compliment to his team that he did not consider it necessary to address the House today. The fact that we have such a substantial majority means that we have sufficient Members to staff Committees.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Liddell: No. I shall make some progress; no doubt I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman later.

This evening, we have discussed what are, in effect, wrecking amendments. Their effect would be to allow pension funds to continue to receive tax credits until April 1999. After that, payments would be phased out over five years.

I am pleased that, at long last, the Opposition have apparently accepted the principle that the damaging distortion of payroll tax credits should be removed, albeit over a more extended period. That hardly seems logical, but we do not expect logic from the Opposition. That is about all that I can say about the amendments, as they are technically deficient in a number of ways. They would only save the payment of tax credits for companies, when most pension funds do not work in that way. They also purport to allow pension funds to continue to receive payment of tax credits after 1999 at a rate of 21 per cent., when by then the rate of tax credit will have been reduced by 10 per cent.

Their inadequacies are not really the point, however. The amendments are designed to wreck the carefully constructed package of corporation tax reforms that we have laid before the House. I referred to the fact that the shadow Chancellor has not been able to say why, if tax credits are so vital, the Conservative Government reduced them. It is clear that tax credits were lowered in order to fill a black hole in the Government's finances. Our changes to the corporation tax structure will assist business by ensuring that there is a reduction in the rate of corporation tax for large and small companies.

It is clear that Opposition Members still do not accept the need for stability and the conditions for long-term growth. That comes as no surprise after 18 years of a Conservative Government who were wedded to the concept of boom and bust. Frankly, people do not want that to continue, and that is precisely why they elected a Labour Government on 1 May.

Mr. Gibb: How is it stable for a family that, under the new Labour Government, has to pay an extra £10 a month because of the Government's decision to abolish mortgage interest relief at source, and an extra £20 on the mortgage because of three interest rate rises, and now needs to find another £20 a month because of clause 19, which will result in higher pension contributions? How can a family find an extra £50 a month if it did not have £50 surplus in its pay slip before the Budget?

Mrs. Liddell: I am surprised by the hon. Gentleman, who prides himself on being a technician. If that is the level of his expertise, for the sake of his clients, I am grateful that he is in the House.

Earlier in the debate, the shadow Chancellor acknowledged that all the rhetoric is pointless. When I challenged him specifically about whether a future Conservative Government would reintroduce ACT, he refused to make any such commitment. That sums it all up. What we have seen here is posturing. Throughout the Standing Committee, Opposition Members were posturing without raising any points of substance.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady berates my caution in not making commitments at this stage in a Parliament. What has she to say of the present Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), who, only months before the general election, gave a clear and explicit assurance to people in the City that the Labour Government had no plans to introduce this very measure?

Mrs. Liddell: The right hon. Gentleman is the shadow Chancellor, and his hon. Friends have subjected us to

[Mrs. Liddell]

weeks of scaremongering. The hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney) legitimately made the point that the worst thing that we can do to pensioners is to introduce uncertainty. The only uncertainty that has been introduced has been created by the scaremongering of Opposition Members. If they were so wedded to the concept of ACT, why in 1993 did the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) say that it was the least damaging way for the Government to raise money?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Liddell: No. I must make some progress.

The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden referred to the mis-selling of pensions. He did it with a straight face. We should like to know how it was that the previous Administration had eight years to act on the mis-selling of pensions, but did not do so. They sat on their hands. That shows how much they were concerned about the impact of the mis-selling of pensions.

The shadow Chancellor made some dubious comments about his visit to Uxbridge and the number of pensioners there who would be affected by the measure. He did not tell us how many pensioners in Uxbridge had been mis-sold pensions and how many of them had died without the problem being solved. We do not take lectures from Opposition Members who have been responsible for the biggest financial scandal this century.

The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden talked about how local authority pension schemes will hit council tax payers. That theme has come up repeatedly in debate. Yet again, I should like to put it on record—I know that Opposition Members do not like listening to the facts—that any impact on local authority budgets will not apply until after the next revaluation in March 1998. I say to the hon. Member for North Tayside that, in Scotland, revaluation will take place a year later than that, so the earliest effect will be between 1998 and 2000. Any impact on budgets will depend on decisions taken by actuaries.

Mr. Ruffley: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Liddell: No, I am going to make some progress.

Any impact on budgets depends not just on the actuarial impact of changes in ACT but on the impact on company performance of the reduction in corporation tax.

Much has been made of the letter that my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing sent in relation to the impact on local authority pension funds. This time, I shall quote from that letter—and I quote accurately. I had the letter in front of me while Opposition Members were trying to quote it, and I found a wide discrepancy between what they said and the facts. The letter states specifically:

> "The Government will take all these factors into account in determining the level of local authority provision for that and subsequent years."

That to me is quite clear-cut.

Mr. Loughton: Will the hon. Lady give way?

6 pm

Mrs. Liddell: No. I want to make some progress.

A number of hon. Members, especially the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, talked about the briefing paper of the Association of Consulting Actuaries. It has been much prayed in aid in the debate. I understand that the consulting actuaries have now acknowledged that they failed to take into account the effect of the 2 per cent. cut in corporation tax rates. They also failed to take into account the distortion to which tax credits led and the preference that pension funds had for dividends rather than capital gains.

Despite all the hyperbole and invective of Opposition Members, the reality is that pension schemes are still very favoured by the tax system. There is tax relief for contributions, plus tax-free build-up, plus a tax-free lump sum where that is part of a scheme. It is important to get a sense of perspective into the debate.

The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) claimed that pension funds would shift out of United Kingdom equities. The decisions that pension funds take are for them. Rational investors put their money where the return is greatest. In international comparisons, the UK still has a very high dividend yield. From 1992 to 1996, the return in UK equities was higher than that in foreign equities, even without the payment of tax credits.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston) made one of his very perceptive speeches in which he talked about the impact on investment of retained profits. We have returned to that point repeatedly. Although it is always very interesting to listen to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies)—once one gets beyond the hyperbole, one often finds that he has something to contribute to the debate because of his expertise and experience—he argued in circles about decisions that companies will take on the future of investment. The Government make the point that it is up to companies to decide what is to their long-term benefit as against distributed profits or retained profits.

The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton made a most impassioned speech about the operation of free markets. For a free market to operate effectively, it has to operate without distortion. Frankly, his argument is fallacious.

I turn to a point made by the hon. Member for North Tayside.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Liddell: Yes, I promised that I would.

Mr. Davies: Does the hon. Lady agree that the abolition of dividend tax credit involves the institution of double taxation in many circumstances? Double taxation is, by definition, a distortion.

Mrs. Liddell: I shall come to that in a minute.

I first want to reply to a point made by the hon. Member for North Tayside, who referred to Standard Life. He said that it was delaying quoting transfer values for people changing occupational pension schemes and claimed that that was due to loss of tax credits. A number of factors affect transfer values for people moving from one occupational pension scheme to another. Share values and general dividend levels, which have been changing substantially over the year, are just as important as issues such as tax credits. There is no reason for Budget changes to cause any serious delay in the quotation of transfer values.

Mr. Swinney: The point which I was making was that, as the hon. Lady correctly identified earlier, a variety of factors will bear on decisions made by actuaries. No one factor can be isolated. If the Government introduce a measure that increases uncertainty in the entire decision-making process of actuaries, they must accept some responsibility for the disruption that that causes in the marketplace.

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman is contradicting the point that he made in his speech. He referred to the need for long-term stability. As long as there is distortion in the tax system, there are automatically preconditions for instability. The change would mean a move to greater long-term stability. The minute that the previous Government started altering the rate of tax credits, a process of uncertainty began. If we want a coherent corporation tax policy, the logical next step is to get rid of tax credits.

I turn to the point made by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford about double taxation of pension funds. There is no such double taxation. The basis of imputation will continue as it is now. Where individual shareholders are taxable on dividends that they receive from a UK company, they will continue to get a tax credit to set against that liability. That mitigates any double taxation. Pension funds, however—this is the point that the hon. Gentleman was seeking to make, but he confused the two matters—are usually exempt from tax. There is no tax charge on exempt pension funds when they receive dividends, so there is no double taxation.

Mr. Quentin Davies: I think that the hon. Lady has seriously misunderstood the basis of corporation tax. The whole purpose of a dividend tax credit is indeed to ensure that pension funds are not taxed. Now, they are having tax deducted in the form of ACT, which is not being refunded to them. They have therefore suffered a tax on their dividends. The hon. Lady has not understood the basis of her own tax system.

Mrs. Liddell: Frankly, that is nonsense, and the hon. Gentleman knows it. I congratulate him on being able to say it with a straight face. To the extent that pension funds are not exempt from taxation, they can set any tax credit against their liability, just like anybody else. In the debate on 9 July, I believe that he suggested that pension funds were being taxed on their dividends. That is not so.

I turn to another point made by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford about pensioners and pension funds being worse off, "if other things remain equal". We are all familiar with that phrase. Other things are not remaining equal. We are cutting corporation tax rates and boosting capital allowances as part of the package. That means that we are not only removing a damaging distortion but encouraging more and better investment, to the benefit of the UK economy in the long term.

Mr. Davies: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Liddell: No, I want to make some progress. I am very anxious to do so because I know that Opposition Members wish to debate other matters. I have already given way a number of times.

I should like to take up one other point that the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford made about whether companies will have to make higher pension contributions to defined benefit pension schemes. There should be no effect on many companies until the next actuarial valuation of their pension schemes, which could be as far as three years away. What is more, removing a distortion benefits the pension funds, because they get a more stable corporate base on which to develop investment.

Mr. Davies: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Liddell: No. The hon. Gentleman made a great contribution in Committee, but he tends to make the same speech, about how companies that invest in research and development pay dividends. If I have made the point to him once, I have made it half a dozen times: yes, many companies that distribute dividends spend money on R and D—but they would do that anyway, because they are large global companies with large reserves to spend on that activity. The change affects specifically the smaller high-tech companies that the distortion has forced to distribute dividends, when it would have been more effective for them to retain the money.

The gracelessness of the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham has marked our debates. On behalf of his hon. Friends, I must testify to the fact that he has been most insulting to them, describing them as "woodentops". I accept that several of them are new to the House, but they tried hard, and the fact that the hon. Gentleman used that description may suggest that he has been indulging a little too much in the English wine about which he talked earlier.

The Leader of the Opposition has talked several times about why the previous Government fared so badly in the general election, and has made it clear that features such as arrogance and a lack of humility put the voters off. Perhaps the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham does not care what the right hon. Gentleman thinks—perhaps he supports the prince across the water—but I must tell him that, when people look at the House and see the condescension that was portrayed in his speech, they tend to tar us all, not only on the Opposition side but on the Government side, with the same brush.

To summarise, we have seen in the debate an attempt to replay the Standing Committee. The shadow Chancellor said that we were ramming the Bill through the House. That is nonsense. Considerable time was given in Standing Committee. That must be so, because I now have an intimate knowledge of the family tree of the hon. Member for Daventry, we have been taken up and down the Orinoco by various members of the Committee, and I also now have a considerable knowledge of English wine, which may lead me to sample it in the next few weeks. However, what we have not heard are convincing arguments about why the Government should not make the change. I therefore ask the House to reject the amendment.

Mr. Lilley: I am sorry that the Minister is made to feel so inadequate by my presence at the Dispatch Box.

[Mr. Lilley]

I assure her that she does not need to feel that way. When I held her post, I certainly did not possess the brazen self-confidence that she brings to it—but then I never had to convince the House that taking £5 billion out of long-term investment would somehow encourage increased investment.

It is undoubtedly a great help to the hon. Lady to have the effrontery that she no doubt picked up in Glasgow politics and elsewhere.

Mrs. Liddell: I feel that, for the sake of my constituents in Airdrie and Shotts, I must make the point that not only am I not a Glaswegian, but I live between Glasgow and Edinburgh, and my constituency lies between Glasgow and Edinburgh. There is no greater affront to a Lanarkshire lassie than to suggest that she is a Glaswegian.

Mr. Lilley: I apologise unreservedly to the hon. Lady, and look forward to the repercussions that her remarks may have among her hon. Friends. I should say that such Scots blood as I have comes from the same part of Scotland from which she comes, so I have no excuse for having made that mistake.

I must return to the essential issue that faced us throughout the Committee stage. There have been only 12 working days between the publication of the Bill and today, the end of Report. That compares with an average of about 77 days during the preceding 18 years of our consideration of Finance Bills.

That is a measure of how compressed has been the time within which people outside the House have been invited to make representations. My hon. Friends have done sterling work in Committee in exposing the inadequacies and putting forward reasoned arguments and propositions, but they have had to do so without backing, without being able to mobilise the considerable unease felt in the country as a whole. People have not had the time they have had in previous years to make representations.

6.15 pm

That is all the more alarming because—I have already exposed this fact—the Government have introduced in this measure the biggest of the 17 tax increases that they have made, in flat contradiction of specific promises and assurances given by Front-Bench Labour spokesmen only a few months before the election.

That is another reason why the Minister needs her brazen effrontery. When faced with the truth, she goes into auto-rant about the defects of other people. The fact is that the people who now form the Government made promises to the British electorate that they have broken, and for which they will be held to account.

The hon. Lady pretends that the measure involves some high-minded purpose to do with fiscal neutrality—but it is not fiscally neutral to take £5 billion out of pension funds. Nothing that she has said, or can say, can convince us that it is. She has not answered the Primarolo paradox. If the measure is harmless, why is it essential to protect charities from its impact? The Financial Secretary to the Treasury could not explain that—and the Economic Secretary has not been able to do so either.

The hon. Lady took up the issue of mis-selling, from which she sometimes shrinks when it is raised from the Opposition Dispatch Box in such debates, although she had the effrontery to say that she would take no lectures from us on the subject. I shall certainly take no lectures from a former public affairs director of the Maxwell group during the four crucial years when Maxwell was ripping off surpluses throughout the country in a way that the Government now seek to emulate.

When I became Secretary of State for Social Security, the biggest issue that I faced was the Maxwell—*[Interruption.]* I got the money back for the pensioners, including the Minister—every penny of it. Not one of those pensioners had to suffer a penny's loss. That is why we will take no lectures, especially on this issue, from a Government who reassure pensioners by putting a former Maxwell employee in charge of dealing with mis-selling, who appoint as a Government spokesman someone who was previously Maxwell's fearless seeker after truth—Alastair Campbell—and who employ Lord Donoughue, one of his cronies, as another Minister. I am afraid that this is not an issue on which we shall take lectures from them.

We want to know the answers to our questions. Will what the Government have done encourage people to opt back into the state earnings-related pension scheme system, as we are convinced it will, and as are all the experts whose testimony I have read out? Do the Government agree that that will be the impact? Was that their intention? Have they made any calculation of the number of people who will be persuaded to opt back in?

Will that number be equal to the number who ought to opt back in? If not, will it constitute mis-selling that those who are not properly informed and persuaded to do that, despite the change in their circumstances, will be left outside with pensions less adequate than those that they could have received inside, because of the changes?

The other big issue that has come up in the debate is the impact of the measures on local authorities. We have received no satisfactory response from the Government Front Benchers to the issues raised by their own Back Benchers as well as ours, and by Labour as well as by Conservative councils throughout the country.

Council tax payers need to be reassured that the change will not inevitably feed through into higher council tax when hundreds of millions of pounds extra are required every year to ensure that local authority employees receive the pensions that the boroughs, the districts and the county councils have promised them. It is just not good enough for the Minister to say, "Oh, we shall not know the cost for a year or so; therefore, we need not take any action or inform everybody about the impact now."

This is a very important issue. Some £5 billion of tax revenue is to be raised for no purpose other than to be spent in future, because Labour Governments only tax now to spend later. The Government are acting in clear breach of their election promises, and in a way that will disadvantage members of occupational and personal pension schemes and leave them in ignorance of how the change will affect them. Our amendments would help to remedy some of those defects, and we urge the House to support amendment No. 16 in the Division Lobby

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 168, Noes 328.

Division No. 71] **[6.20 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard *(Shef'ld Hallam)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bercow, John
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Thomas
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Webb, Professor Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Dafydd
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nigel Waterson and
Mr. Malcolm Moss.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon
(Dunfermline E)
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
(Copeland)
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*

Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny
(Wolverh'ton SW)
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George
(Hamilton S)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine
(Morecambe & Lunesdale)
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann
(Dewsbury)
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Jamieson and
Janet Anderson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule 3

INSURANCE COMPANIES AND FRIENDLY SOCIETIES

Mrs. Liddell: I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 64, line 22, leave out 'In'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 12 to 15.

Mrs. Liddell: The amendments take us into the wonderful mysteries of the taxation of life assurance companies. I shall not go into too much detail on this subject, because I do not want hon. Members to get too excited before the holidays. I shall try to give a brief explanation of the purpose of the amendments.

Hon. Members will perhaps detect that the amendments have something to do with foreign income dividends. When we dealt with clause 36, we discussed at length the abolition of FIDs in 1999. The amendments have nothing to do with abolition: they are about the treatment of FIDs received by a life assurance company after 1 July 1997.

Schedule 3 makes a number of detailed changes to the tax treatment of dividends received by life companies, one of which involves the calculations that are made to determine what part of a life company's income is charged at special rates, what part is charged at policyholders' rates and what part at normal corporation tax rates. The Bill, as drafted, made a minor but necessary change to the way in which ordinary dividends are treated in that calculation, and the treatment of FIDs should have been changed in the same way. However, it was not, because an oversight that occurred when reference to FIDs was inserted in the 1994 Finance Bill was regrettably repeated this year. The amendment makes the necessary change. Failure to do so could cost a few million pounds a year, depending on the extent to which FIDs are paid in the future.

A related change made by the amendment is to remove some disadvantages that life companies have perceived. They affect the so-called notional case one test, of which the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) gave an eloquent description to the Committee considering the 1996 Finance Bill. The test involves a comparison of profits calculated in two different ways. FIDs have hitherto appeared on one side of the comparison but not on the other. There might have been good reasons for that at the time, but, with the treatment of FIDs and ordinary dividends in the hands of life companies and other dealers in shares becoming more similar, there is less reason to distinguish between them.

I may add that, in proposing this change, we have taken account of representations made by the Association of British Insurers.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 12, in page 64, line 23, leave out from 'companies)' to end of line 28 and insert

'shall be amended as follows.

(1A) In subsection (2B) (relevant income from life assurance business to be sum of items in paragraphs (a) and (b)) for paragraph (b) (relevant franked investment income) there shall be substituted—

> "(b) the franked investment income of, and foreign income dividends arising to, the company which are referable to its basic life assurance and general annuity business."

(1B) In subsection (8) (interpretation) the definition of "relevant franked investment income" shall cease to have effect.'.—*[Mrs. Liddell.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We now come to Government amendments Nos. 13 and 14.

Mr. Gibb *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: These amendments have already been debated. We are now voting on them.

Amendments made: No. 13, in page 69, line 36, leave out 'and'.

No. 14, in page 69, line 43, at end insert

'and

> (c) in paragraph (c) (which provides for Case I profits to be reduced by the shareholders' share of foreign income dividends in respect of such investments) for "in respect of investments held in connection with the company's life assurance business" there shall be substituted "which are referable to the company's basic life assurance and general annuity business".'.—*[Mrs. Liddell.]*

Clause 30

TAX CREDITS

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I beg to move amendment No. 25, in page 22, leave out lines 24 to 37.

The intention of the amendment is to modify the Government's proposals on distributions and tax credits arising on or after the tax year 1999–2000. It would strike out the provisions of the Bill that deprive United Kingdom residents who are not taxpayers of the payable tax credits that they can now claim on their dividends. We believe that the amendment says a great deal about the philosophical differences between the Conservative party and the Labour party, and a good deal about the practical outcome of the stances that they each adopt: where they are coming from affects where they get to.

There was a point in the partial imputation system that was introduced by a Conservative Government in 1973. Those of us who served on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill know that the Economic Secretary has emphasised her belief that that was a distortion. She has sold her proposals not as a tax increase—which they are—but as the removal of a distortion that has crept into the tax system. We do not accept that.

I remind the House that the purpose of the changes introduced nearly a quarter of a century ago in 1973, after the former Labour Chancellor, Lord Callaghan of Cardiff, had unsuccessfully tried to produce something similar to what the Government are producing now, was to avoid double taxation on the same profits arising in the hands first of the company then of its shareholders. That was done by arranging that advance payments of corporation tax against dividends should be met by a matching tax credit in the hands of shareholders.

Shareholders were then, and are now even more, a heterogeneous bunch. Many more shares now are held by institutions, some of which, such as pension funds, are non-taxpayers; others, such as insurance companies, have special arrangements. Income on dividends for pension funds is effectively exempt because the funds pay their tax on the way out to pensioners, in whose hands it is taxed.

Other types of shareholders include collective investment vehicles, such as the unit and investment trusts that we debated extensively in Committee, and holders of personal equity plans, who are individuals, but in a protected environment. There is still a significant number of private direct shareholders, especially in privatised companies; it has been estimated that at the peak there were about 10 million, and anyone who reads a company's annual report and looks at the distribution of shareholders will be likely to find that, although the majority of the share capital is held by institutions—often by a limited number of institutions, such as pension funds—there is a numerical preponderance of individual shareholders, who in some cases still account for a significant proportion of the share capital. Those shareholders pay varying rates of tax: some are higher-rate taxpayers; some on the basic rate; some on the lower; and some, the subject of the amendment, do not pay income tax at all.

There are two remarkable aspects of the Government's proposals. The first is that they have found it necessary to put in place elaborate arrangements, as set out in schedule 4, to effect them. Schedule 4 introduces us to the delights

[Mr. Tim Boswell]

of schedule F ordinary rate, higher rate and trust rate, on the back of a residual tax credit of 10 per cent. The reason for that residual tax credit will become apparent later on.

The effect on the lay taxpayer, the man or woman who has an income from employment and a few shares—let alone somebody older, with a pension and a few shares, who does not find forms easy to manage—is likely to be pretty awkward; the more so now that self-assessment is being introduced.

There will be serious trouble with the self-assessment forms, given that we are talking about a limited amount of people's personal income. It is not their professional income from employment, and they will not all have accountants. It is pretty difficult even for accountants to contend with some of the complexities of schedule 4.

I hope that the Economic Secretary will reflect on those concerns; perhaps she can find a simpler way of effecting the measures. If she reflects, as I wish that someone had reflected before the Bill was introduced, she may come up with a simpler structure.

The Government have set up an elaborate, roundabout route, if not to Paradise by way of Kensal Green, at least to Birmingham by way of Beachy Head. They have very probably succeeded in their goal of achieving no detriment to the ordinary or even the higher-rate taxpayer. Praise the Lord: the Paymaster General is unscathed by the measures. It is only the non-taxpayer—the Aunt Agatha, although she will change her name later in my speech—who will lose out.

The second rather bizarre aspect of the proposals is that Ministers show clear signs of not knowing what they are doing; perhaps that is understandable, even if not formally excusable, given the complexity of the proposals. Conservative Members are thoroughly familiar with the law of Bristol, South, as enacted by the Financial Secretary, from whose constituency it is named. Speaking of the impact of advance corporation tax changes on pensioners, she said:

> "The measure is good for pensions and pensioners, not bad for them."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1997; Vol. 297, c. 507.]

The same philosophy seems to have affected the Economic Secretary, who said:

> "Ordinary shareholders who previously did not pay tax are not adversely affected by the Bill."

Search me about that; indeed, search my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), because when he rose more than once in the dialogue that ensued to challenge her about that assertion, she replied:

> "I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the *Official Report*."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 21 July 1997; c. 224-25.]

Her latest statement on the record therefore remains uncorrected. I believe that it is wrong—we challenge it—and that she should use this opportunity to correct it formally.

6.45 pm

There will indeed be an impact on non-taxpayers who previously received the benefit of payable tax credits, which will be withdrawn with effect from April 1999. Within two years—this is the sole exception of treatment—non-taxpayers will be in exactly the same position regarding payable credits as pension funds are now, although there are some significant differences between them.

The first difference is that pension funds are much larger, accounting for about half the value of the current tax credits, while individuals, excluding those in PEPs, account for only about £100 million, and the second is that pension funds and other institutions have effective voices to lobby and cry foul at the Government's proposals—they have indeed lobbied us and we rehearsed those points extensively in Committee—but Aunt Agatha has usually and typically only herself to rely on. She will not know what has hit her until she finds that she can no longer reclaim the cash.

In its Budget submissions, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales cited an example of a widow aged 80 with a state pension of £3,247 a year and dividends of £1,600, which currently attract a tax credit of £400, which is about £8 a week. Even if she were still to get the nominal 10 per cent. tax credit—and the Government do not propose to offer her even that—she would be £222.23 a year worse off; as it is, she will lose the whole £400. As the institute says, the effect is harsh and is likely to encourage such people to dispose of their shares.

Because people in that situation are approaching the end of their working years, although I hope not of their natural life, and can hardly plough new savings into, for example, individual savings accounts, having instead to rely on what they have, the measure is a dead loss to them.

In Committee, the Economic Secretary briskly referred to the need to encourage savings, presumably in a tax-sheltered medium, such as gilt-edged, and made the remarkably clear but remarkably challengeable assertion that tax credits for non-taxpayers are a contradiction in terms. In doing so, she revealed that she simply did not understand—or, to put it more charitably, perhaps did not accept—that companies representing shareholders were already paying corporation tax on behalf of all their shareholders, including the non-income-tax-paying shareholders who are the subject of the debate. I say "companies representing shareholders" because the two cannot, as it were, be unpicked.

The final anomaly of treatment, which gives rise to political as well as technical concern, is that the Government can take tax credits away from those with no power, but fight shy of taking them from those with more clout. The Budget documentation revealed that foreign shareholders receive some £600 million a year in payable tax credits—but they, of course, have the protection of double-tax agreements. That is what the tax credit—continuing and notional, and never repayable—is about. The Government must go through the rigmarole of maintaining a notional 10 per cent. tax credit as a basis for calculating relief for overseas taxpayers.

The Government now say that the effect is so small that it will make no difference, and that the effective credit is likely to be about 0.25 per cent. of the total income. That gives rise to a dilemma. Either the Government have kept faith with the spirit of the double-tax agreements that are being concluded for this country, or they have gutted them, while preserving a legal shell against legal challenge for the renegotiation of those agreements. Either they are repaying significant funds to overseas shareholders, or they are not; and I think that if they are not, overseas shareholders and their Governments will draw an inference from that. The tension that is thus engendered also gives rise to unfairness in the difference between the treatment of the foreign taxpayer—the foreign shareholder—and that of the domestic shareholder.

Not only do the Government dislike the small domestic shareholder, whom they deny the benefit of credit that is available to higher-rate taxpayers in this country—because it will still run for lower, basic and higher-rate taxpayers—but they dislike the United Kingdom resident shareholder and non-taxpayer so much that they are prepared to contrive, notwithstanding the complexity involved, to contemplate a system that pays credits to the foreign resident who is in exactly the same income position as the domestic taxpayer to whom they deny those credits—or even in a better position. In those circumstances, I think that Aunt Agatha will change her personality.

Let us suppose that I have two aunts—Aunt Ursula, who lives in Uxbridge, and Aunt Bertha, who has gone to live in Boulogne. Whether she has gone for the seafood or to watch French films—which we debated in another context in Committee—I know not. Both have inherited from their mother a share portfolio—what Victorian novelists would have described as a modest competence—worth, say, £10,000, which generates an annual income of £500. In addition, Aunt Bertha has shares from her late husband worth, say, another £10,000, which means that she has two modest competences, as well as a residence in Boulogne. The other income—pensions and so forth—is the same in both cases.

In those circumstances, who will receive more help from the United Kingdom Treasury—Aunt Ursula of Uxbridge, or Aunt Bertha of Boulogne? You have guessed it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Not only does Aunt Bertha receive a tax credit on her husband's shares; she receives a tax credit on the shares that she inherited from her mother—which the Economic Secretary is denying her sister Aunt Ursula, who happens to live in Uxbridge.

I shall draw my remarks to a close, having exposed the incoherences of the Government's approach. I can only conclude that the Government have either been hasty in preparing the legislation, or exercised malice. Either they intended to do what they have done, or they do not care what they have done. They preach the brotherhood and sisterhood of man, they talk about the need for investment and they introduce what they would call a Budget for the people; but, when we vulgar persons analyse the Budget, we find that it gives tax credits to British shareholders only when they have enough capital to generate an income large enough to incur tax, and gives greater credits to those who go abroad than to those who stay in this country. It targets the pensioner of modest means who needs the tax credits most. It is unfair and, in the amendment, we challenge its damaging social agenda.

Mr. Gibb: As my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said, the amendment seeks to end a distortion introduced by clause 30. The Government contend that by removing the ability of non-taxpayers to retain their tax credits, they are removing an anomaly or distortion; but the contrary is true. All the measures in the Budget introduce a severe distortion.

The explanatory note attached to clause 30 states:

> "Currently, the system actually goes further than simply mitigating any double charge to tax. Where a person is exempt from tax, or where their tax credits exceed their tax liability, the tax credit can be paid to them. This introduces a distortion into the system. The payment of tax credits to certain shareholders means that profits paid out by a company can actually face a substantially lower effective tax charge than the profits which are retained by the company and reinvested."

That is a political statement if I ever heard one. Similarly, "The Pocket Budget", produced with £50,000 of taxpayers' money—the so-called Inland Revenue explanatory note—makes a political statement, with which Conservative Members whole-heartedly disagree. My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) has already explained that the imputation system does not introduce a distortion, and that removing the so-called distortion itself creates a distortion. The Inland Revenue seems content to state categorically that there is a distortion, but it is treading on a political issue—and, again, the Government are using taxpayers' money to air a political issue.

That point goes to the heart of the imputation system. With your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me try to explain to Labour Members precisely how the imputation system works, and how the taxation of a dividend in the hands of an individual works. Let us suppose that a dividend of £80 is paid to an individual by a United Kingdom company. That £80 must be grossed up in the individual's tax return by tax credit, and the individual is therefore regarded as having received taxable income of £100. A basic-rate or lower-rate taxpayer will have £100 in his or her tax return, and will then pay tax at 23 or 20 per cent., depending on whether he or she is a basic-rate or lower-rate taxpayer. The lower-rate taxpayer will therefore have a tax bill of 20 per cent. of £100, which is £20.

That £20 bill is paid by the tax credit that is attached to the dividend, so the lower-rate taxpayer will have no further liability. The basic-rate taxpayer will have a theoretical bill of £23, but he, too, will have no further tax to pay, because the tax credit received with his dividend wipes out his bill, too. We then turn to the higher rate taxpayer, who is regarded as receiving £100 of dividend income. He or she is taxed at 40 per cent. on that income, so the tax bill is £40, against which is a placed tax credit of £20, giving a final tax bill of £20.

We then turn to the position of the non-taxpayer, who is again regarded as receiving £100 of gross income from the £80 dividend because the dividend has to be grossed up. On the non-taxpayer's tax return, if one is filled in, it says £100 of taxable income from dividends less the personal tax allowance—the implication being that a non-taxpayer has not yet fully used up the tax allowance—therefore the tax bill will, in effect, be zero.

However, the non-taxpayer will have only a cheque for £80 in his or her hands, despite having theoretically having received income of £100. Where does the remaining £20 come from? The answer is that the non-taxpayer applies to the Inland Revenue, which sends a cheque for £20, corresponding to the tax that the company paid over to the Inland Revenue through the advance corporation tax mechanism just after the dividend was paid. The company has paid the tax of the taxpayer, but if the individual receiving the dividend is

[Mr. Gibb]

not a taxpayer, that individual expects to get the tax back and thus be in the same position as the other two types of taxpayers in having received gross income of £100.

7 pm

That is how the imputation system works. As it is currently structured, there is no distortion in the system. The explanatory note goes on to say:

> "The payment of tax credits to certain shareholders means that profits paid out by a company can actually face a substantially lower effective tax charge".

That is misleading: it is not the tax credit that creates the lower effective rate of corporation tax; it is the personal allowance of the non-taxpayer that gives rise to that beneficial effective tax rate. The personal allowance of about £4,000 means that someone earning only £4,000 per annum faces a lower effective rate of tax than someone earning £5,000 per annum; and someone earning £5,000 per annum faces a lower effective rate of tax than someone earning £6,000 per annum. That is because Parliament has decided that people on low incomes should pay a lower effective rate of tax. The House decides at every Budget that it is right that people on low incomes should pay a lower rate of tax, which is why we have the whole notion of personal allowances.

The same applies to pension funds. Parliament decided that pension funds should be tax free, and the purpose to making them tax free is to encourage and help people to save for their old age. That is and should still be a priority, given that the era we are entering is one of an ever-aging population. The fact that a company appears to have a lower effective rate of tax when it distributes profits to a non-taxpayer is irrelevant, because that arises from the special status that we have deliberately attached to non-taxpayers. Parliament decreed that certain individuals should be non-taxpayers for the sound social reasons of helping people on low incomes and encouraging people to take out pensions and provide funds for their old age.

The essence of the imputation system—or, as it should be called, the partial imputation system—is that the combined tax position of both the company and the shareholder is looked at. In most cases, where the shareholder pays tax, the profits distributed are taxed—broadly speaking—only once, at the rate applicable to company and shareholder. For example, a basic rate taxpayer will pay no more tax because the company from which the dividend is received has paid tax on those profits at 33 per cent. A higher-rate taxpayer will pay a little more, because he or she pays tax at 40 per cent.

A UK company receiving a dividend from another UK company will pay no more tax, because the company paying the dividend has already been taxed. When a non-taxpaying shareholder receives a dividend from a UK company, the overall tax position is that the company and shareholder will have an effective rate of tax of about 15 per cent., because one half of that combination of company and shareholder—the shareholder—is not taxable, so the imputation system does not seek to extract tax from that individual. To do so would be to impose a tax that Parliament has decreed, for social reasons, should not be imposed.

The new Labour Government do not understand business tax or the imputation system, so they have effectively imposed a tax that is focused solely on non-taxpayers. It is the most regressive tax ever imposed, and the amendment seeks to undo that damage.

I had hoped that the amendment would be drafted a little wider, because the clause has a detrimental effect on overseas investors. My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry has given a wise explanation of why the Government decided to halve the tax credit from 20 to 10 per cent., apparently in order not to contravene the treaties.

Let us suppose that a United States shareholder invests in a wholly owned subsidiary in Britain. Previously, that company was able to obtain a repayment of half the tax credit, less a withholding of 5 per cent. of the net dividend plus the tax credit. That meant that the effective rate of tax for an overseas United States shareholder in a UK company was about 28 per cent. instead of 33 per cent. It was therefore attractive for US companies to own and invest in the UK.

Now, however, halving the 10 per cent. tax credit leaves only 5 per cent., from which is withheld 5 per cent. of the net dividend plus the tax credit. That leaves almost nothing—in fact a repayment of only 0.25 per cent. or less is received, which will not be attractive to investors from the United States. The consequence of the measure is that it will discourage investment in the United Kingdom, yet the Budget was meant to encourage investment by companies.

Overall, the clause is highly damaging to shareholders, non-taxpayers and overseas investors. Had the Government spent a little time between announcing their Budget intentions and drafting the Finance Bill, and gone to the trouble of consulting outside bodies, many of these points would have been spotted. The Government have accused Conservative Members of arrogance in the way our arguments were advanced but the truth is that the arrogance is on the Government side. Why did they not spend a little time consulting? There seems to be no real evidence that there was any requirement to get the Finance Bill passed by 4 August—that is certainly the understanding of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales—so the rush can only be put down to the arrogance of newly gained power.

Another example of that arrogance comes in clause 39, in which there is a drafting error. The error does not appear to have been amended in the Standing Committee, yet I raised it in Committee. The Financial Secretary said to me:

> "I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point."

She went on:

> "I am happy to write to him and to other members of the Committee making our"—

that is, the Government's—

> "intentions absolutely clear. If the hon. Gentleman is correct, we shall have to return to the matter."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 22 July 1997; c. 393.]

Of course, I have received no such letter, and the drafting error in clause 39 remains.

Mr. Boswell: I may be able to help my hon. Friend.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Can the hon. Gentleman explain to me why he is discussing a different clause? The amendment before us relates to clause 30. How does clause 39 relate to that?

Mr. Gibb: I raised it as an example of the Government's arrogance, but I take your point, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hoped that the clause would be amended before Third Reading, and I am keen that the Bill should not enter the statute book containing a drafting error.

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend may not be aware that, within the past few hours, I have received a response from the Government on that point. This shows that it is difficult for any of us, particularly when we cannot seek outside advice and do not have access to expertise, to know whether it is right. It is unfortunate that my hon. Friend has not yet had a chance to see the letter, let alone assimilate it. I am afraid that the same points may well apply to clause 30 as well.

Mr. Gibb: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing that out, and I look forward to reading the letter when I sit down. I rest my case, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The amendment was drafted to try to alleviate the unjust position that clause 30 creates, particularly for non-taxpayers. Many retired people in my constituency of Bognor Regis and Littlehampton have small portfolios of shares. As a result of the Budget, after April 1999 they will no longer be able to reclaim small sums of money back from the Exchequer on receiving dividends from their small portfolios.

The measure is regressive and unfair, and I hope that the Government will accept the amendment as a way of alleviating a distortion created by the Finance Bill.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The Liberal Democrat party supports the amendment whole-heartedly, as it aims to protect non-taxpaying pensioners on the lowest incomes.

Some of the points that Conservative Members and I raised in Committee were not properly answered by Ministers, who showed no regard for the effect that the measure would have on low-income pensioners. They claimed that that category of pensioners would be protected because removal of tax credits would be phased in and would not come into effect until April 1999. The Government say that, by that time, they will have put in place individual savings accounts, enabling such pensioners a tax exemption on those dividends.

I would argue, however, that the Government are not living in the real world. The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) described the real world of self-assessment and complicated tax legislation. In the real world, savers are inert to changes in the tax regime. Aunt Agatha and Aunt Ursula are probably the most unresponsive of savers. They do not read the financial pages of Sunday newspapers every week for advice and they are much less likely to be aware that such tax measures have even been introduced. Indeed, Aunt Agatha will probably get a shock in April of the financial year 1999–2000, when she will lose her tax credit. She was probably looking forward to spending it, although it would probably have been spent on making ends meet.

The money that will be taken from those pensioners will make the difference between giving them some dignity in their old age and giving them no dignity. I should like to understand why the Government proposed that move, particularly given the efforts that they have expended on behalf of foreign shareholders and higher-rate taxpayers. I do not criticise those efforts, but simply say that the Government seem to have perverse priorities if they wish to protect those affected by the changes. Why are they not acting on behalf of Aunt Agatha and Aunt Ursula?

The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) said that part of the Government's argument is that they want to remove all distortions from the system. I disagree with the hon. Gentleman that the change in ACT does not remove distortion; there is a genuine argument that removing the ACT credit system removes distortion in the way companies decide on their dividend and investment policies. However, removing tax credits from non-tax-paying pensioners is not about removing distortions; it is about over-tidy minds in the Inland Revenue.

It is preposterous to suggest that protecting that group of non-tax-paying pensioners would have led to distortions within companies' dividend policies. It is ludicrous to suggest that quoted companies would change their investment mix if that protection were given to non-tax-paying pensioners. The Liberal Democrat party will therefore support the amendment whole-heartedly.

7.15 pm

Mrs. Liddell: I oppose the amendment. I do not wish to keep repeating myself—although why should I change what has been happening for the past couple of hours? The amendment goes over old ground and was discussed at length in Committee. It would stop the second stage, in 1999, of the abolition of payable tax credits for all UK shareholders.

I am not clear whether the amendment is also intended to allow pension funds to claim payment of tax credits again from 1999, although that may be one of its consequences. It comes to mind, given the comments of the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) on a previous set of amendments. I do not want to go over old ground. We have explained again and again why we have taken action to remove a distortion in the corporation tax system, which was affecting company behaviour and investment.

The entitlement to payable tax credits is removed from pension funds from Budget day and from others from 6 April 1999. The amendment would stop the second element of that change, leaving in place a permanent anomaly and distortion whereby some people would be entitled to a payable tax credit while others would not. That would simply not be sustainable.

As I have said repeatedly, it was not easy to decide whether we should move to abolish tax credits, because we recognised that it would be a complex measure and that we would have to take into account many knock-on effects. Clause 35 relates to charities, which was the subject of one of the best debates in Committee. Hon. Members on both sides recognised the great work done by charities and were unanimous on wanting to protect them. This measure, however, seeks to get rid of a distortion.

If we simply wanted to get rid of the distortion and completely ignore the long-term needs of ordinary savers—the Aunt Berthas, Aunt Agathas and Aunt Ursulas—the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) would be right to criticise us. If we sought simply to draw the line in 1999, he would be right to condemn us for saying that ordinary taxpayers

[Mrs. Liddell]

would not suffer. However, that is not what we are doing. We are taking a two-year period to allow people to adjust their portfolios and savings requirements.

By 1999, we hope to have in place individual savings accounts. I have already made it clear to Opposition Members how anxious we are to include them in discussions about the future of individual savings accounts.

That is why, if the hon. Gentleman quotes what I said in Committee and does not match it with our intention to introduce individual savings accounts, he is right. However, through individual savings accounts we are seeking to develop a savings vehicle that suits all low-income savers, and is transparent and easy to understand. For many people, savings are as complex as the taxation system. We now have an opportunity to introduce a savings account that Aunts Agatha, Bertha and Ursula would find easy to comprehend and which would benefit them.

Mr. Gibb: The hon. Lady used the word "protected" with regard to charities. She said that charities need to be protected. I asked her from what. Perhaps I can suggest an answer: protected from the damage that clauses 30 and 19 do to charities. If she believes that charities should be protected from those devastating measures, what about pensions and non-taxpayers? Do they not also need protecting?

Mrs. Liddell: If the hon. Gentleman wants me to replay all the arguments of the Bill, I will happily do so, and it will take up the time until 9 o'clock, which will mean that hon. Members will not have an opportunity to debate other matters.

We took action to protect charities because they do not have the freedom of manoeuvre that other investors have. That is why we have given seven years. It is interesting to see the extent of the selective amnesia of Opposition Members. It was the previous Conservative Government who reduced the level of ACT. In doing so, the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) said clearly:

> "I did not seek to disguise the fact that the measure is revenue-raising. It is intended to raise revenue from a part of the economy where it can be raised, in the context of the Budget, with minimum damage."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 15 June 1993; c. 387.]

We have acknowledged that charities will encounter difficulties. We recognise that if we take away something that has benefited certain groups of savers, we must put something in its place. That is why we are moving to the introduction of individual savings accounts.

I challenge the hon. Gentleman. Here is an opportunity for him to channel his undoubted talents into helping to create a savings vehicle that takes into account those who do not even have the modest competence about which the hon. Member for Daventry spoke. The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton belongs to a profession that is not known for hyperbole. He should remember that. He speaks about the measure as the most damaging and regressive change in the history of creation. That is wrong. We are getting rid of a distortion so that we can improve matters for the future.

It does no good to attack officials. The hon. Gentleman may think that in attacking me, he is attacking only me, but when he attacks the Revenue, he attacks the officials who construct the explanatory notes, and they do so with the best intentions.

We had a lengthy discussion in Committee about self-assessment. Hon. Members spoke about the complexity of the tax system. May I point out that the tax system did not become complex just from 1 May. The previous Government had 18 years to demystify the taxation system and the legislation surrounding taxation. What we propose to do with corporation tax and ACT is to remove yet another complexity from the taxation system.

There will be plenty of time to adjust the forms that must be filled in for self-assessment, to take the change into account. When taxpayers receive dividends, their dividend voucher will show, as now, figures for the dividend and the tax credit. They will have to copy those over to their tax returns, just as they do at present. They will not have to do anything more when completing their tax returns. The hon. Member for Daventry and I discussed in Committee the need to make all the procedures as straightforward as possible.

We had our usual foray into geography with the hon. Member for Daventry. I always learn new phrases from him. I had never heard the one about Paradise by way of Kensal Green. In Airdrie and Shotts, I may have difficulty explaining that to the people of Bonkle and Newmains, who do not even know where Kensal Green is. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the information that it was an allusion to G. K. Chesterton. It is some years since I last read Chesterton, but perhaps we can have a conversation about it some time. I have some comments to make, but I will not take up the time of the House.

The Government have been honest and open about the decision to enhance the neutrality of the taxation system. We have tried to have a full and wide-ranging debate. A number of hypothetical cases have been used. The hon. Member for Daventry spoke about the 80-year-old widow; the same example was used by the Institute of Chartered Accountants. She will not save more through 1999. However, she will be able to switch to tax-favoured individual savings accounts during 1999. The decision about whether she saves more is entirely up to her.

Let me take up the issue of Aunt Bertha from Boulogne, vis-a-vis Aunt Ursula from Uxbridge. Neither UK nor French individuals will generally be able to obtain payment of tax credits from 1999. Credits will not generally be available to portfolio investors such as Aunt Bertha. The notion that Aunt Bertha would be more severely disadvantaged than Aunt Ursula is wrong.

Mr. Boswell: I should be grateful if the Economic Secretary would clarify the point. If there is provision for relief for foreign shareholders under double tax agreements, why should it not be available for the individual portfolio investor?

Mrs. Liddell: Individual portfolio investors have two years to adjust their portfolios. The question of tax credits for non-residents under double taxation agreements was fully discussed. The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton began the debate on double taxation agreements in the Standing Committee. Some agreements with other countries provide for a given proportion of tax credits to residents of those countries. It has always been clear that, if the amount of tax credit fell, so would the payment under the agreement. That happened in 1993, as I am sure right hon. and hon. Members can tell the hon. Gentleman.

That follows the spirit and the letter of our agreements with foreign Governments. We are not overriding those agreements. We are keeping tax credits at a certain level, to try to avoid any question of disadvantage to UK-based groups with US subsidiaries and some US investors, mainly individuals in US-dollar-denominated preference shares issued by UK banks and others.

There is an interesting assumption that the Labour Government are suddenly homing in on ACT. In reality, the previous Government began eroding ACT in 1993. Only a few weeks ago, the special adviser to the former Chancellor referred to the distorting impact of ACT. It is wrong to suggest in the extreme phrases that we heard from the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton that the change represents the end of civilisation as we know it.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who had Edward Troup as his adviser, clearly received information that there was a distortion. I cannot believe that, in the space of a few days, that gentleman would have changed his position. It is a logical assumption that the previous Chancellor was urged to get rid of the distortion.

We have carefully considered the effects of the change. That is why we are anxious that individual investors should have the opportunity to invest in new tax-privileged individual savings accounts in 1999. If we were not offering that, there would be some substance to the hon. Gentleman's criticism. However, we intend to take that measure. I have suggested that there is cause for common ground in creating an acceptable tax vehicle. That is one of the reasons why we have been generous in providing transitional arrangements for charities so that they receive compensation over five years.

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Lady has said that those who will be disadvantaged by the provisions—several examples were given earlier—will be compensated by the individual savings account. Will she give an assurance that the Treasury will consult those who are disadvantaged and who have investments at present?

7.30 pm

Mrs. Liddell: There will be widespread consultation. We referred to that at great length in the Standing Committee. The second stage will not kick in until 1999 in order to give people an opportunity to adjust their portfolios, given sensible advice and in recognition of the nature of the individual savings account that will be on offer. I urge the House to reject the amendment.

Mr. Boswell: The Economic Secretary is clearly in a hole, and she is doing her best to scramble out of it. She has created a series of measures in haste that target the least well off and the least sophisticated shareholders. Although she has not explicitly conceded that she is doing damage, her comments suggest that some will be damaged unless they rearrange their affairs. She has made a series of suggestions about what may be done in two years through the individual savings account. That may be a way forward in the future—particularly if the hon. Lady is prepared to rebrand as an individual savings account the small shareholdings of individuals who do not want to change those shareholdings or lose control of them.

We have no details of that proposal at present, and no clear proposition in that regard. We have simply a withdrawal of the payable credit in two years. That is the Government's certain proposal. We find it socially damaging and unacceptable, so we shall press our amendment to the vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 149, Noes 326.

Division No. 72] **[7.31 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard *(Shef'ld Hallam)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Ottaway, Richard

Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Webb, Professor Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Malcolm Moss and
Mr. Nigel Waterson.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Burden, Richard
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hess'le)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce

Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George
(Hamilton S)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine
(Morecambe & Lunesdale)
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann
(Dewsbury)
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Jamieson and
Janet Anderson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 36

FOREIGN INCOME DIVIDENDS

7.45 pm

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 29, leave out lines 11 to 27.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 24, in schedule 6, page 80, leave out from beginning of line 22 to end of line 8 on page 86.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Nothing displays the Government's muddled and incompetent policy in this entire Budget better than these two amendments and the clause to which they relate. Foreign income dividends can appear somewhat technical, and it is no disrespect to hon. Members if I say that some of them may not have followed the intricacies of the British corporation tax system. Most people have better things to do, but, luckily, the effect and purpose of the dividends can be easily stated in non-technical terms.

FIDs, as they are called, are a way of relieving certain multinational companies based in this country from paying excessive corporation tax. Without FIDs, important British companies with large foreign earnings would be unable to relieve their advance corporation tax payments. Therefore, they would be paying ACT and tax on their foreign earnings. That is unfair and excessive, as was recognised by the previous Government, who introduced foreign income dividends to relieve the situation.

Under the Government's proposal, British companies earning profits overseas but based in the United Kingdom, would be put at a disadvantage in relation not only to ordinary British companies, but to foreign multinational companies based here. We would have the absurd situation in which a multinational British company would suffer unfair competition from a foreign company, perhaps operating in the same markets, and would be vulnerable to takeover by such a foreign company.

Despite those well-known facts, in his Budget statement the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced with a flourish that foreign income dividends were to be abolished. Any first-year accountancy student or half-decent tax practitioner could have told him that that was daft. We do not know whether he received such advice. I imagine that he probably did, but, with that ignorance, combined with arrogance, that has been the hallmark of the entire Budget process, he went ahead and announced the abolition of foreign income dividends in two years' time. He wrote that into the Bill in clause 36, and in the six-page schedule 6.

When we reached clause 36 in Committee, we warned Ministers that the abolition of foreign income dividends would be extremely damaging, and we advised the Government to withdraw the proposals. As usual, the debate was guillotined, so we had no real opportunity to explore the subject at great length. All six pages of the complex schedule 6 went entirely unexamined because of the timetable motion imposed by the Government.

Luckily, however, we were not entirely alone in drawing attention to the damage that might be caused. When the companies affected heard the Chancellor's statement, they contacted the Treasury and made it clear that, if they were treated in the way set out in the Budget, they would simply leave the United Kingdom. They would prefer to remain here, but they do not have to be located here. They are, by definition, international companies, they operate in many different markets, they have investments in many other countries, and, if pressed, and if sufficiently damaged by the change, they would relocate. The Government would lose not only some important British companies, their headquarters and the employment that they offer, but all the tax.

Even this Government realised that something was wrong, so they eventually started to listen. Not only were they contacted by the companies themselves, but they received urgent representations from business associations and institutes, such as the Confederation of British Industry and the Institute of Directors. All pointed out to the Government how stupid the proposal was.

Drawing almost at random from the letters sent to me as a member of the Finance Bill Committee, I have here a letter from the Association of British Insurers. It says:

> "The measure will have very detrimental effects for British based international groups. There has been inadequate time for consideration of the measure. In these circumstances I ask you to press the Government to withdraw the measure."

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

I believe that that letter was sent to all members of the Committee, but, as usual, Labour Members showed no interest in standing up for British business. They remained entirely silent about the matter, and it fell to my hon. Friends on the Committee to make the appropriate noises.

We now have a Liberal Democrat gracing our presence here this evening, but that is unusual, because they were seldom present in Committee. Perhaps one or two Liberal Democrats are present. I apologise to the hon. Member for Taunton (Mrs. Ballard), who comes from my county of Somerset. I particularly welcome her presence this evening.

However, their presence was highly unusual in Committee, and, during the debate on foreign income dividends, not one Liberal Democrat was present, despite the fact that they had been alerted to the damage that would be caused to important British companies, many of which operate in their and our constituencies. As usual, it fell to Conservative Members to take the entire burden of opposition to this particularly daft proposal in the Finance Bill.

We are not here dealing with a few odd British companies with highly unusual tax positions. We are dealing with companies such as BAT Industries, Burmah Castrol, Coats Vyella, Glaxo Wellcome, Reckitt and Colman, RTZ, SmithKline Beecham and Taylor Woodrow, to name just a few. The damage caused caught the eye of the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry in particular, and it wrote in strong terms to, I think, all members of the Committee, certainly to the Government, in a release headed "Planned tax changes 'could drive firms out of UK'". Its chief executive said:

> "We are concerned that these proposals will drive many companies out of the UK as they will object to having to pay a tax 'double whammy' in Britain and abroad."

He urged:

> "the decision to scrap FIDs was over-hasty and unjustified."

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): Will the right hon. Gentleman list those companies which have said that they will be leaving the United Kingdom, rather than mention a long list of companies which we all know about? Which ones have said that they will be leaving the United Kingdom if what the right hon. Gentleman says takes place?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The discussions between the companies concerned and Ministers were presumably confidential. The companies do not want to issue threats. They prefer to make the threats in private.

I have spoken to representatives of the companies concerned, and they have made it clear to me that they do not have to put up with a hostile tax regime in Britain. They would prefer to remain in the United Kingdom. We are a magnet for these companies. They like our low costs, our flexible labour market and our business-friendly environment, all of which are very much the achievements of the previous rather than the present Government; but they have made it clear that, if they run up against a tax regime that does not understand their particular requirements, and effectively subjects them to double taxation, they will relocate.

If the hon. Gentleman does not think that that was a consideration, will he explain why the Government capitulated and agreed to look again at the matter? They realised that they had made a mess of this, and finally listened to the entreaties. In other words, the penny finally dropped. The Chancellor, and the Paymaster General in particular, realised that a major mistake had been made, and they went into a frenzy of back-tracking, side-tracking and general confusion.

Of course we welcome the rethink—we welcome it when a sinner repents—but the fact that the Government are thinking again does not stop some of the damage. There is still a great deal of uncertainty around about the Government's intentions.

During the debates on the timetable motion, we heard how important it was to get the Bill through in order to give taxpayers certainty. Do my hon. Friends remember that? We heard a lot of that, particularly from the Financial Secretary, who said that certainty and stability were crucial, so the Bill had to be put on the statute book without any delay. But that rush has created the very uncertainty we now see.

The Government have withdrawn the original damaging proposal to abolish foreign income dividends, but they have not replaced it with anything else. Many companies are highly uncertain about what sort of tax regime they will face in future. They do not know where they stand, and the Government still not have told them.

We listened with great interest in Committee when we reached clause 36, when the Paymaster General was due to tell us the result of his deliberations. Although we laboured under the timetable motion, we were careful to give him plenty of time to expand on his plan to give taxpayers the certainty that the Government deemed so important.

What a terrible disappointment that all was. The Paymaster General admitted that a great rethink was going on. Remarkably, he started with the suggestion that it was the companies themselves that should come up with a new arrangement. He seemed unwilling to do any of the work. However, a little later he said that he had four options. They were sketchily set out in his remarks. The first is clearly completely dotty. He suggested that he might restrict foreign income dividends to companies mainly in foreign ownership. To discriminate even more transparently against British companies in that way does not solve the problem; it makes it worse.

As we proceeded with the non-explanation of the conclusions to the non-consultations, we became more and more depressed, because it was apparent that the Government were in a terrible muddle, and were really a victim of their own guillotine. They wanted to bring forward some alternative proposals, but the timetable motion that they have imposed on the Bill and on the House made it impossible to consult fully and table proposals in time for consideration in Committee and by the House.

By bringing forward legislation in such a rush and by refusing to consult, the Government have fallen into their own trap. They now realise that the abolition of foreign income dividends is unsustainable. Therefore, clause 36 and schedule 6 are damaging, contradictory, defective and wrong.

8 pm

Nevertheless, in Committee the Government insisted on passing that clause and schedule into law unamended. They say that they will look at the issue again, but it is extraordinary that, having failed to consult before legislating, they are now legislating before consulting. That is a serious matter for the House, which is being invited to pass into law something that the Government know is wrong.

Luckily, the House has two amendments before it which would remove the whole shambles from the Bill and give the Government an opportunity to think, discuss and consult. After all, the measures would not have come into force for two years, anyway, so what is the hurry? Sheer arrogance is preventing them from withdrawing these damaging measures, which they know are wrong. Instead, they intend to force into law something that they admit is wrong and damaging, simply because they lack the courage to withdraw it.

I urge the House to take advantage of these modest amendments, which would remove the confusion from the Bill and give the Government an opportunity to have a genuine re-think.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): After the attack on pension fund accumulations, the two other aspects of the Finance Bill that do most damage are the abolition of foreign income dividends and of TESSAs and PEPs in 1999, without announcing what the Government intend to put in their place.

The main advantage of the Anglo-Saxon economies of north America and Britain, in contrast the continental Europe economies, has always been the clarity of our tax law, which has been sharply defined both in this House and by the courts. In continental Europe, tax law is a political mush, with many areas where it is not clear what is within or without the law.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) said, to legislate for the abolition of FIDs in 1999, but then to say that that will not happen and that the Government will sort it out in the 1998 Finance Bill, makes no sense. Having recognised the problems, the correct course must be not to change the law until there has been full consultation.

Similarly, woolly statements in the Budget speech and in Committee about ending TESSAs and PEPs in 1999 and putting some undefined individual savings accounts arrangements in their place creates unnecessary uncertainty for savers and for the investment management industry. I declare an interest, as I spent 25 years in the industry, and I remain the deputy chairman of an international investment management company.

I recollect that the Chancellor stressed in his Budget speech that his key long-term objective was to increase investment in this country. However, the two interrelated actions that I have described are bad news for savers and for investors, especially at a time when the Government should be promoting and strengthening measures to encourage savings.

If we want to take pressure off interest rates and sterling, we should encourage people to save the £32 billion pay-outs from mutual building societies. Surely we saw the problem coming, so the Finance Bill should have included appropriate measures. The way to achieve higher investment is through higher savings. Anything that is a potential attack on savings is bad for investment. I shall return to that point later.

I want to focus specifically on FIDs. Surely it is self-evident that it is desirable to retain and encourage international companies based in the United Kingdom. Whether they are foreign-owned or internationally owned, they are a source of tax revenue and employment, with a spin-off for accounting, legal and other services.

Our long-term history shows the wisdom of encouraging our businesses to invest profitably overseas, whether through direct investment by individual companies or portfolio investment by individuals or pension funds. The abolition of FIDs would undermine that. If international holding companies do not know where they stand, which will be the case if the Finance Bill goes through unamended, there is every motive for those companies not to take risks, and to consider moving somewhere else. In addition, I believe that the estimated savings of £250 million per annum are highly optimistic.

The conditions suggested by the Paymaster General to alleviate the position make little sense. If we require 80 per cent. foreign ownership, that merely encourages foreign takeover of British companies, but also encourages British-based international companies to move elsewhere. If we require a fixed percentage of overseas earnings—90 per cent. has been suggested—that would be illogical and inflexible. Indeed, it would discourage international companies from setting up in the UK. To limit the amount that companies could pay out in an FID would impose a fiscal distortion on UK companies' overseas investment.

My biggest objection is one of principle—the attack on FIDs is an attack on the principles behind the double taxation treaties and the underlying equity thereof. Aside from the practical problems that that raises, I am surprised that it should ever have been considered by the Government.

The present rules permit advance corporation tax paid on FIDs, which cannot be offset against UK corporation tax, to be recovered. The reason is simple. An international company pays its taxes in the parts of the world where it operates. It gets double taxation relief on those against UK corporation tax. If it pays dividends, which is a normal and proper thing for a company to do, there is likely to be a shortfall that cannot be offset against its specific UK corporation tax liability.

Therefore, the net effect of abolishing FIDs is that British-based international companies will suffer a tax disadvantage against UK companies. That then encourages UK companies to concentrate their investments in this country, and not spread them around the world where we have such a good record.

More narrowly, FIDs abolition, as proposed, represents for the UK investment management industry a complete undermining of several years of work and substantial expenditure by both the Government and the industry in developing the open-ended investment company as a UK-based investment fund structure designed to compete attractively with Dublin and Luxembourg, encouraging foreigners to come to the UK to use an OEIC to structure their funds to sell around the world. If people go to Dublin or Luxembourg, they will take not only fund management fees but all the ancillary accounting and legal revenues.

[Mr. Howard Flight]

It is no wonder that Dublin is laughing, as it again offers a substantial tax advantage for international funds. Speaking as someone in the industry—after years of work trying to get the right product—I find it frustrating that the ground is being cut from under such products just as we are about to use them.

Also damaging for the United Kingdom investment management industry, and related to our not knowing what will happen with FIDs and ACT after the next two years, is the announcement that PEPs and TESSAs will be abolished. Middle England has to be clear that PEPs and TESSA will end.

We have received some notice of the nature of the proposed individual savings scheme in the Inland Revenue's news release, "A New Individual Savings Account". Having thought about the matter in some detail, however, I believe that whatever is proposed will be considerably less attractive than the current PEP and TESSA arrangements if ACT is lost and if the FIDs measures are passed. It will also be less attractive in principle.

The announcement mentions proposals that tax relief will be limited, up to an overall—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is speaking about matters that are not relevant to the amendment. We are debating foreign income dividends, not savings schemes. He was properly speaking to the amendment; perhaps he will do so again.

Mr. Flight: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I apologise. I ask the indulgence of yourself and of the House, however, because the matters are interrelated. As you will have noted, when Conservative Members make a point about something damaging investors' interests—whether it is abolition of ACT or of FIDs—we receive the reply from Ministers, "But we have this new savings scheme, which will answer all the problems." I believe that it is fair to give the matter an airing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It may seem fair to give the matter an airing, but the House has given me its rules, which state clearly that hon. Members must stick to the amendment and not stray from it. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will find another opportunity to raise those issues.

Mr. Flight: I hear what you say, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that you will give me an opportunity on Third Reading to deal with the matter.

The point that I wish to stress is that abolition of FIDs and the other tax proposals that I have mentioned will not only damage for UK international businesses but bring a lack of clarity to our tax system. The measures are also damaging to the UK investment management industry—which I should have thought it was in the interests of the Government and the House to support. Unless our amendment dealing with FIDs is passed, we will make no progress with the OEIC scheme in competing for business with our competitors in Luxembourg and Dublin.

I hope later today to have an opportunity to deal with the issues. The measures will be damaging if they are passed unamended. They are bad aspects of the Budget and of the Finance Bill, and we should correct them before they become law.

8.15 pm

Mr. Brooke: My speech will be extremely brief. I think that I am right in saying that my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), the Paymaster General and I are the only four hon. Members participating in the debates on this Finance Bill who were on the 1978 Standing Committee.

I remember the Paymaster General with particular affection on that occasion, because we tried to cause the House to sit into August, and the only way in which we could accomplish that was by ensuring that the Finance Bill was considered for a decent length of time. On one occasion, he joined us after dinner and—slightly to the distress of his Whips—made a very powerful speech, in which, for our purposes, he gently steered the ball towards his own goal. Against that background, and with immense good will, I should like to ask him one question. I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will not rule me out of order.

I served in the Committee on the Housing Act 1996. The Government had proposed in that Act several clauses that they subsequently withdrew because of representations from people in my constituency. Although the Minister for London and Construction, the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford) made a powerful speech explaining how incompetent the then Government had been, the Opposition had not explained what was wrong with the clauses.

In the case of this Finance Bill and foreign income dividends, not only the Conservative party but my constituents, in a series of multinational companies, have drawn the Government's attention to what is wrong with their clauses. In the Government's posture, I do not understand—I hope that the Paymaster General will tell us—why Ministers, unlike those dealing with the Housing Act 1996, will not straightforwardly withdraw the clauses and return with the proposals on which, they say, they are consulting. Why are Ministers ploughing ahead and saying that they will consult after the clause has been passed? I do not absolutely follow the logic of the Government's actions.

Mr. Gibb: I do not know whether the Government are aware how much damage they are doing with their decision to abolish foreign income dividends, how much damage has been done since 2 July 1997 or how much damage is being done daily as Ministers dither in deciding how to extract themselves from the mess that they have got themselves into. Conservative Members have mentioned in this debate the problems of United Kingdom companies with overseas holdings, and I mentioned those problems in an earlier debate. Today, however, I should like to deal with the equally disastrous problems—which my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) mentioned—that the City of London will face.

The history of the City of London has been bound up in collective investment vehicles. Unit trusts, particularly, have been an enormous success, although they are not particularly attractive vehicles for overseas investors—especially continental Europeans, who do not really understand the trusts concept. Consequently, in recent years, centres such as Dublin and Luxembourg—which my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South

Downs also mentioned—have become much more popular locations for collective investment vehicles. The asset management side of the industry is located in the United Kingdom, but the back office—which represents about 60 per cent. of managers' cost base—is located with the vehicle.

Dublin and Luxembourg have open-ended company vehicles rather than trusts. Therefore, those locations have recently become enormously popular for collective investment vehicles. Luxembourg and Dublin combined now have a 22 per cent. share of the European funds market—which represents 12 per cent. growth in just five years. In the same period, the UK's share has remained static at 10 per cent. Moreover, in that period funds managed in Luxembourg and Dublin have quadrupled while those in the United Kingdom have only doubled.

In 1992, the combined assets of UK fund managers in Luxembourg and Dublin were three and one third billion dollars. By 1995, they had increased to $20 billion. Sixty three per cent. of Dublin business has been undertaken by UK fund management houses. This means that we are exporting jobs to Dublin and to Luxembourg. We are talking about thousands of jobs in the back office—jobs in the accountancy and legal professions, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs also alluded. In co-operation with the City and the Government, the concept of an open-ended investment company was recently developed. These OEICs were introduced precisely to deal with the problem that I have just outlined.

OEICs are attractive to European investors, but only while we have foreign income dividends. If those companies are to be attractive to European investors, they will have to invest in European or overseas equities. By definition, investors want to reduce the risk of, for example, currency fluctuations, so they will want to invest through vehicles which will themselves invest in European and overseas equities. Of course, if those overseas equities are paying dividends to the UK OEICs, those dividends will have been taxed in the overseas jurisdiction; when they arrive in the UK vehicle, they will be subject to UK tax, but that tax will be offset by double taxation relief.

We now reach the point at which those vehicles want to pay dividends to their investors. Again, the companies will be subject to advance corporation tax, but there is nowhere for those vehicles to offset their ACT because there is no mainstream UK corporation tax liability. The ACT is therefore simply carried forward from one year to the next, indefinitely into the future. As such, it becomes an irrecoverable cost. Unless we have foreign income dividends, it becomes an unsustainable cost.

If a company can demonstrate that the dividends that it is paying out of the OEIC derive from overseas investment income, having FIDs means that that company can obtain a repayment of the ACT that was paid when the dividends were initially paid. Effectively, that means that the ACT is no longer a cost and the company is being taxed only once on its overseas profit. That is precisely what FIDs were designed to do and why OEICs have become an attractive vehicle. If OEICs do not have FIDs, the attempt to overturn the rise of Luxembourg and Dublin will fail. OEICs are taxable on their income at 20 per cent., but they are exempt from tax on their capital gains.

Research shows that, if the Government retained FIDs, and if OEICs were fully established in the UK, a European portfolio moving to the UK would yield more than double an identical fund in an offshore centre, and the yield would be about 40 per cent. more for a global fund than for a European fund. That is the result of the previous Government's development of FIDs and, of course, of our favourable double taxation treaty network.

Until the Budget, Luxembourg and Dublin were greatly concerned about the development of OEICs and the fact that we have FIDs. However, on 4 January the *Financial Times* said:

> "OEICs are expected to stem an exodus of investment business to Dublin and Luxembourg."

The previous Government had successfully tackled a serious problem for the City of London but, alas, we then had the Budget on 2 July.

Investment Week magazine states:

> "Perpetual is to consider selling offshore funds to the UK market following the Government's decision to scrap Foreign Income Dividends (FIDs).
>
> The fund management group is one of several that have now put on hold plans to establish UK-based OEICs to sell into Europe"

and

> "repatriate funds from Dublin or Luxembourg . . . These include Standard Life, Henderson Investors and Barings.
>
> David Mossop, chief executive of Perpetual said:' . . . We have plans to start marketing into Europe in 12-24 months and will now have to consider using Luxembourg vehicles rather than UK OEICs.'"

That is the consequence of this enormously damaging measure.

I refer the Paymaster General to the letter from Sheila Nicoll, director of legal and fiscal affairs at the Association of Unit Trusts and Investment Funds, who says:

> "we will continue to stress the need for an early statement"

on FIDs. She continues:

> "Damage has already been done, and while the toothpaste clearly cannot be put back in the tube, a clearer statement at Report Stage that Ministers have no intention of damaging the international competitiveness of UK-based funds would at least prevent more spillage."

In Committee, the Paymaster General accepted that the Government had committed an enormous gaffe and had been wrong to propose the abolition of FIDs, and that they were now going to consult interested parties to see whether they could come up with a solution to the problem that they had created. He suggested four solutions but, even during the enunciation of those potential solutions, he said:

> "I do not know whether any one of these suggestions will solve the problem."

I will briefly run through the Paymaster General's four suggestions.

The first was that the Government

> "could relax the shareholding condition for the international shareholding company rules."

International holding company rules are slightly different from FID rules. One can establish an international headquarters company, which means that one is not obliged to pay ACT initially—one can pay a FID without paying ACT in the first place. When the Chancellor introduced that scheme, he pointed out that the

[Mr. Gibb]

international holding company rules will remain in place so that these provisions can be used. As everyone knows, however, the international holding company rules can be used only by companies which are at least 80 per cent. owned by non-residents.

The Paymaster General's first suggested solution was thus to relax the rule that international holding companies should be 80 per cent. owned by non-residents. He said that the Government could "reduce that percentage", but to what does he propose to reduce it? If he were to reduce it to nil, he will be virtually reintroducing FIDs, so why on earth does he not withdraw the clause and schedule 6, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) proposes?

The Paymaster General's second proposal was to

> "allow surplus ACT to continue to be reclaimed by companies which derive 90 per cent. or, perhaps, a lower percentage—".

Is that not virtually bringing back FIDs? The third suggestion was

> "to limit the amount of FIDs that a company could pay to the amount that it had paid historically, perhaps in the average of the past two or three years."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs said, that is a terrible distortion of the tax system. It is also horribly complicated but, in any case, if the Paymaster General does that, is he not virtually bringing back FIDs?

The Paymaster General continued:

> "A fourth option would be to that a company could pay no more than a specified proportion of its dividends as FIDs."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 22 July 1997; c. 386-7.]

Depending on what proportion the Government deigned to allow the companies to pay, they may or may not be virtually bringing back FIDs. If the Government allowed a lot of FIDs to be paid, they would be bringing back FIDs.

All the Paymaster General's proposals admit that the only solution to the terrible mess that the Government have got this country and the City of London into is to bring back FIDs. Why is he prolonging the agony of international and multinational companies based in this country, and that of City fund managers who want to boost London as a centre for collective investment funds, by saying they have to wait until the 1998 Budget before he can undo the damage that the Government have now done? Why does he not instead simply accept the amendment and withdraw this very damaging clause, so that, from now on, the City of London and the multinational companies can get on with what they do best, which is investing and making money for this country?

The Paymaster General (Mr. Geoffrey Robinson) *rose—*

Mr. Woodward *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to speak, he will have to be quick.

Mr. Woodward: I apologise for being so slow, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In considering the amendment, I find myself questioning the rationale behind it and the rest of the Budget. Why, when there seems to be so much evidence to support the need for consultation and a review, do the Government wish to proceed with the clause? The amendment is sensible, given the sheer body of opposition to the proposals.

8.30 pm

Let me remind the House what the Paymaster General said in Committee:

> "There will be two years in which we can not only ask but consult them, and we have made it clear that we will do so."

He then referred to my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton):

> "What is the hon. Gentleman on about? I cannot understand the sense of his remarks."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 22 July 1997; c. 387.]

I should like to make some sense of the remarks that the Paymaster General found so difficult to draw together. They were ably and simply expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), who suggested that the right thing to do would be to withdraw the clause altogether, rethink it and come back with some better proposals.

There is no question that FIDs were introduced to benefit the United Kingdom. The purpose of the current FIDs system was to provide a means by which companies with foreign operations could avoid double taxation. I hope that Labour Members do not support double taxation, despite their addiction to taxation as a means of living. Double taxation should always be resisted. The reasons for the introduction of the system are extremely important.

The amendment seeks to remove the distortion that the clause will introduce. It is yet another example of the Government's desire to proceed with precipitous haste. They have been in government for only three months and yet they are throwing out this proposal. Has their policy really been thought through?

There is now evidence from so many companies which earn a great deal of money for the United Kingdom. They are clearly extremely worried. The Paymaster General said in Standing Committee that he could not understand what we were on about. It is very simple: we are expressing the concerns of businesses up and down the country that earn money for this country. We are at a loss to understand, if the right hon. Gentleman knows that a review is necessary, what is the point of proceeding with the clause. Of course, withdrawing it might involve some loss of face, and we know that the Minister without Portfolio would be extremely upset with his colleagues were they to do that, but is the measure right for Britain?

The Government spend hours every day constructing reviews and appointing business leaders from all over the City to join various projects. Would it not be better to withdraw the clause and then to draw in experts from some of those companies to review the matter properly and look in detail at the consequences of what the Government wish to achieve?

The Association of British Insurers has been perfectly explicit. It states:

> "The measure should be withdrawn and any changes in this area should be the subject of full consultation."

The Government are in love with consultation and working parties. They prefer a review, when a decision would be more appropriate. In case after case, they have a review or set up a working party. Yet when business says, "Let us have a review and full consultation," what happens? In the most arrogant, high-handed way, the Government say, "No, we know best: we will introduce the legislation and if there is a problem, we will try to clear it up in the next two years."

The Association of British Insurers points out:

> "The purpose of FIDs is to ensure that British based multinationals are not at a tax disadvantage in respect of trading income and dividends received from abroad. The withdrawal of the FIDs regime will place such groups at a disadvantage."

What is the point of that? The Association of British Insurers recognises:

> "Foreign-owned groups will not be affected by this change because they will be able to set up International Headquarters Companies to remit dividends overseas without paying ACT."

What do the Government have against British-based multinationals?

The Government spend a great deal of time talking about the need to create certainty and stability. The Chancellor claimed that his entire Budget was predicated, as he claimed, on the need to create certainty. Yet declaration after declaration by company after company is that the proposal will create uncertainty and instability.

Only a few weeks ago, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that there would be "no U-turn" on FIDs. He also added that the Paymaster General was in talks with companies to find an alternative. Where is the certainty when on the one hand the Government say that they will do something but on the other hand realise the need for consultation? What is gained by their precipitate haste?

Some of the companies are issuing warnings. The chief executive of Lasmo wrote to the Chancellor as follows:

> "The very independence of Lasmo, and all British companies which have had international success, is put at risk by your proposals, as we will simply be worth more to a foreign acquirer than we can be on our own."

Is that not a significant warning that the Government might wish to heed?

Time after time, we hear sermons from Labour Members about why the Conservative party failed to understand. In speech after speech and sermon after sermon in Committee we heard that our knowledge was not relevant because we lost the election. But the warnings are not from Conservative Members: they are statements from the companies that will be affected by the proposals.

Burmah Castrol, the oil company, said that it would lobby the Chancellor, and stated:

> "It seems a shame that successful groups are being penalised in this way. We need to review our options. Moving offshore is not high among them but remains a possibility."

Rio Tinto, the world's largest mining company, is also understood to have written to the Government expressing its opposition. Glaxo Wellcome and BAT have also said that they intend to make known their opposition to the change as they are worried about double taxation on profit. We are talking about big money. Brokers estimate that it represents up to 5 per cent. of United Kingdom dividends.

The consequences of the proposal are serious. SmithKline Beecham, which earns more than 90 per cent. of its profits overseas said:

> "This is a disappointment. If London is going to be a centre for raising capital, this is hardly the thing to do."

So why is it being done now? The purpose of our amendment is to ask the Government to have a little humility. The Chancellor, the Paymaster General and the Chief Secretary lecture the Conservative party on the need for humility. Is there not something for them to learn, too? Should they not show a little humility in recognising that, when company after company clearly express not minor concerns but grave, serious concerns about the proposals, it might be better to amend the Bill and take the proposals out pending further consideration?

The Chancellor said that, to stop the yield from ACT being eroded by greater use of foreign income dividends, the Government were ending foreign income dividends from 6 April 1999. Yet expert after expert tells us that that defence is a fig leaf. The change is an arbitrary revenue-raising mechanism. The Government should not take my word for it. I know that Government Members will simply respond to the words of Opposition Members by saying that they are, in their eyes, the words of a discredited Tory party. They do not have to accept our words. They should take the words of Paul George, tax adviser with the accountants Coopers and Lybrand. He said:

> "The abolition of Fids will bring back a distortion in the tax system which can penalise overseas investment by UK multinationals. The logic for the change is not clear."

We are searching for the logic, the rationale behind the fact that, although the Government are claiming that they are removing distortions, company after company and adviser after adviser are telling them, "Hold back: this may be a mistake." Yet the Government are proceeding with extraordinary haste in their concern to, in their eyes, tidy up the distortions that they see.

Why do the Government not listen to some of the bodies that I have mentioned? Why do they not have the humility to recognise that in this Finance Bill, which has been put together at extraordinary speed, covering a wide range of areas that were never anticipated in the Labour party manifesto, it would be better to hold back, review, involve all groups who have expressed concern, accept the amendment, and withdraw clause 36?

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I shall not need to detain the House for very many minutes as we approach the final moments of the Finance Bill debates. What we have heard has, sadly, been nothing more than a rehash of what we heard on Second Reading and in Committee. Much though we welcome the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) to the Opposition Front Bench, he, too, had nothing to bring to the debate.

I shall deal with the core question first to get it out of the way. The simple reason why we had to introduce clause 36, which puts an end to foreign income dividends in two years' time, was that, if we did not, there would be a rising net cost to the Exchequer of almost £1 billion. That is simply because, having removed one element of distortion—the tax credits—in the arrangement that the previous Government had rightly struck between shareholders, companies and the Exchequer, there was every incentive for multinational companies to move much more heavily into FIDs.

I ask Opposition Members to reflect for a second on the fact that, despite introducing the arrangement four or five years ago, multinationals have continued to pay a great deal of dividends in the normal way simply because they have

[Mr. Geoffrey Robinson]

been under pressure from their shareholders for them to obtain tax credits. We do not have precise figures on how much they have paid, but it is a substantial amount. That could grow very much more quickly in the new, unbalanced situation. We want to discuss that balance with industry, consult industry and negotiate with it. For the arrangement to be balanced, it has to be fair among the three parties.

For the Opposition to criticise the Government for allowing time to consult is to deny completely all their criticism about lack of consultation. In this case, we have provided all this time for consultation, which has been welcomed by the companies concerned. We are determined and confident that we will reach a new arrangement with them.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If the Government wish to protect their revenue, while at the same time protecting the position of important British companies, why did they not announce a consultation exercise with a view to legislating in a future Finance Bill? Why rush ahead with an ill-judged announcement about the entire and immediate abolition of FIDs, which has turned out to be a fiasco?

8.45 pm

Mr. Robinson: I notice that the right hon. Gentleman challenged not the need for a review but the need to get the balance back that his own Government so rightly struck when they introduced FIDs. The point is very narrow. We had to include in the Bill the fact that we could not accept the tax loss that could well amount to more than £1 billion. Industry had to be notified of that. That does not mean that we are prejudging in any way where the new balance will be struck or the mechanism for it.

I notice that Opposition Members were scathing about some of the proposals that I put forward just as starters, but two of them came straight from the initial consultation that we have already had with companies.

Mr. Gibb *rose—*

Mr. Robinson: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a second. He might deal with the following point in his intervention. I do not think that he is a scaremonger or very irresponsible—if he is, I have misjudged him—but ever since we have been discussing the point, he has mentioned the damage that it is doing. Why did Billiton go ahead with a major flotation that was a great success?

Mr. Gibb: I have been told about the damage to which I have referred by the Association of Unit Trusts and Investment Funds. That is the body which is most concerned about the damage. The proposals are doing enormous damage to the City of London. Investment in OEICs has almost been totally wiped out by them. You refer to my criticism—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Member should be referred to as the Paymaster General.

Mr. Gibb: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Paymaster General refers to my criticism of his four proposals and says that one of the proposals came from industry itself. The reason why I am scathing about them is that they virtually mean that FIDs need to be brought back. If he is merely going to bring them back, why does not he do it today?

Mr. Robinson: We need a new arrangement—a properly balanced arrangement like the previous one among the three parties. That is what I am sure we will strike.

Mr. Loughton *rose—*

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman missed much of the debate, but I know that he was very vocal and garrulous in Committee, so I shall give way to him.

Mr. Loughton: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's somewhat more subdued comments in comparison with the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, who is not in her place. Perhaps, as an employee of the company that floated Billiton, I could be granted the opportunity to respond to the question that he asked my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb). Why did that company have to be floated at a substantially reduced price than was previously anticipated, due to the changes in the Budget? If it had not been affected by those changes, why is the share price heading below the issue price? The change has not been taken very well, has it?

Mr. Robinson: I should have thought that a share price returning to its issue price happens quite often in the markets. The hon. Gentleman should know that far better than most in the House, and perhaps even better than I. As I have said before, I long ago gave up trying to read the markets and how a price may move on a particular day.

I do not know of any criticism of the Government from the Flemings advisers—I imagine that the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) was declaring an interest, if he still retains one—or from the company itself. If he considers a personally written letter that arrived on my desk—I will spare him the embarrassment of quoting from it—he will find that the negotiations that we conducted with Billiton and its advisers might well serve as a model for how Government and industry can work together. Far from there being damage, the Government have regained the confidence of industry and of the stock exchange, and we are building on that.

Mr. Brooke: I thank the hon. Gentleman genuinely for the straightforward way in which he answered my question. What I am not quite clear about—perhaps he could clarify this—is whether the events on 2 July in the Chamber, on 4 July in Standing Committee, and in debates today are exactly what the Government intended in the first instance.

Mr. Robinson: Yes, exactly. The relevant part of the Budget speech by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who has just joined us for these climactic moments as we move towards the last few seconds of the debate, said precisely that. We could see that there would be a problem, and we said, "That is why it has to end then. We must have new arrangements."

I, too, remember the Finance Bills that the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) rather ungraciously brought up. He knows that to be straightforward and clear-cut gives a deadline against which the negotiations can be undertaken, a benchmark against which the new arrangements can be set. That is precisely what we have done.

Far from there being any uncertainty, we have certainty in the markets, and a willingness on the part of all the major companies that have written to us to enter into the negotiations. We are determined to reach a balance between the three interested parties.

SmithKline Beecham has already proposed one of the suggestions that I put forward. Flemings has also put forward one of the proposals—I see the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) nodding. For all I know, there may be better and more radical proposals, but what I do know is that we are approaching the negotiations in a spirit of commitment and determination, and that industry is doing the same.

Throughout our debates we have seen and heard the Opposition's crass hypocrisy. They say that they do not have enough time; then they filibuster for hours to fill the time that they get. We have seen them perform with rank incompetence from the very first day, when they could not table any amendments that were in order. The best that they have been able to do tonight consists of two wrecking amendments, which I urge the House to reject.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Why cannot the Government, just once, admit that they have messed up? That is clearly what happened, and we all know it. Any impartial outside observer—there are plenty of them—realises that the Government have fallen into a trap of their own making.

On Budget day the Chancellor announced with a flourish, and without qualification, that he would abolish foreign income dividends. He did not say that he might not do it after all, or that he might have a second thought. He did not say that he would consult. It was a bald and unambiguous assertion: foreign income dividends would go.

That is what is in the Bill before us. Clause 36 does not refer to any conditions being attached. Schedule 6, which, sadly, the guillotine denied us the opportunity to debate, puts into practice and lays down detailed mechanisms for the abolition of foreign income dividends.

We all know what happened then. The Government suddenly realised that they had made a mistake. Under the impact of what the Opposition said, what the trade associations, the Confederation of British Industry and so on said, and what the companies were saying, the Government suddenly realised what any tax practitioner could have told them—that one cannot simply abolish foreign income dividends and expect important British companies to go on locating in the City of London or elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Companies are subject to double taxation without the relief granted by foreign income dividends. We know that, and now the Government know it, too. They did not know it on Budget day, but they have learnt it since. An extraordinary combination of ignorance and arrogance characterised both the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement on Budget day, and the bluster of the Paymaster General throughout the Committee.

The Paymaster General refused to admit that the clause was defective. It apparently protected the Revenue, but by threatening to drive companies out of the United Kingdom altogether it would have the paradoxical effect of decimating revenues.

Why can the Government not withdraw the clause? It will not come into effect for two years, anyway, so what would be lost by admitting that they have made a mistake? If they accepted our amendments, they would thereby withdraw the damaging proposals and could then have their discussions and consultations with those affected. That would enable them to bring forward some genuinely thought out proposals in plenty of time for the next Finance Bill.

The Government have not established that there is a threat to the Revenue. The Paymaster General merely asserts that there is. Even if there is a need to protect the Revenue, while balancing that with the needs of British companies, that is all the more reason to take the matter rather more slowly.

The Government are a victim of their own timetable motion. We know that, and it is extraordinary that on this small item, this small amendment that would simply withdraw from the Bill something that they know to be wrong, they, in their pig-headed way, proceed in the knowledge that they are thereby putting into law something that they know to be damaging.

We shall persist with our amendments and press the matter to a Division. Outside commentators will draw their own conclusions—that, when the Government talk of the need for a partnership with industry, a need to consult and to listen, those are hollow words from a hollow Government.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 150, Noes 330.

Division No. 73] **[8.54 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard *(Shef'ld Hallam)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa

Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Professor Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Oliver Heald and
Sir David Madel.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne (Aberd'n S)
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon (Dunfermline E)
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne

McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie *(Scarborough)*
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan

Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine
(Morecambe & Lunesdale)
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann
(Dewsbury)
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Nine o'clock, Mr. Deputy Speaker *proceeded, pursuant to Order [14 July] and Resolution [yesterday], to put forthwith the Question on an amendment moved by a member of the Government.*

Schedule 8

REPEALS

Amendment made: No. 15, in page 95, line 4, column 3, at beginning insert—

'In section 76(8), the definition of "relevant franked investment income".'.

—*[Mr. Darling.]*

Bill reported, with amendments.

Order for Third Reading read.

9.7 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alistair Darling): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This debate concludes proceedings on the first Finance Bill of the new Government. The Bill goes a long way towards implementation of the manifesto commitments that we made prior to the election and resulted in our winning. It introduces a number of measures that are good for the long-term health of the economy. The measures that we have taken in the Budget and in our reform of the way the Bank of England fixes short-term interest rates will ensure that we have a stable platform on which to build for the future.

Before I deal with the merits of the Bill, I want to say a word or two about a recurring theme of the debate. Conservative Members referred to the guillotine and to proceedings on the Bill generally. We had the usual two days in Committee of the whole House, nine sittings in Standing Committee A and the best part of two days on Report. If there was insufficient time to discuss everything that the Opposition wanted to discuss, they have only themselves to blame. From our proceedings in Committee—both here and upstairs—it is obvious that the Opposition did not make the best use of their time.

For example, on Wednesday 23 July, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), who has won the respect of all hon. Members on previous Finance Bills, and whose ability to speak without notes on any subject for any length of time the Whips care to allot him is unparalleled, was warned under Standing Order No. 42, which deals with "irrelevance, or tedious repetition", because he spoke for more than an hour on clause 43, which the Opposition did not even oppose.

The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Woodward) spoke for about an hour on a measure relating to the film industry that the Opposition did not oppose. We had a long discussion about the mother of the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and whether she was Welsh. At one point, the shadow Chief Secretary told us about a tour that he had taken in various parts of the world. We had all sorts of discussions.

We know, because we had 18 years—rather too long—to practise, that it can be easy and tempting for the Opposition to filibuster and waste time when there is no matter of substance to discuss. Conservative Members and those who follow our proceedings outside the House have every right to expect that legislation should be studied line by line, but the Opposition did not put their limited time to good use in this instance. Some Labour Members believe that the Opposition's strategy all along was not to

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

discuss the matters in hand, so that they would have some reason to complain afterwards. That is a matter for the Opposition.

We gave ample time—more than has been given in the past—to debate the Bill. It is surprising, especially in view of everything that the Conservatives said during the general election campaign and right up to the Budget, that they gave the windfall tax on the privatised utilities such scant attention. That, we were told, was to be the main battleground for the Tory party, yet it was not even mentioned on Second Reading and there was scarcely any criticism—certainly none of substance—in Committee. The Opposition talked a lot beforehand, but when they had the opportunity to table amendments, they could find nothing that they wanted to criticise, and did not even bother.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): I agree with my right hon. Friend about the weakness of the attack. Many of us regret the fact that the Budget's weaker points were not scrutinised more diligently by the Opposition. Perhaps I can now help to rectify that. Does he think that the Opposition did not really attack the windfall tax because they did not think that it was too bad? As they had seen all those City forecasts that the utilities could stand £10 billion of tax, our settling for half that amount seemed like a pretty soft option.

Mr. Darling: I am sure that my hon. Friend needs no encouragement to follow the Opposition and offer his own criticisms. Before the general election, we always said that the windfall tax was reasonable in every respect, and so it proved when it was announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. It was a reasonable amount because we are a reasonable Government.

What is more, the tax will be applied to a reasonable cause: helping to equip the country for the future and to give many young people and the long-term unemployed some hope. Perhaps that is why the Conservatives gave up on their opposition to it: perhaps they realised that people in general, and even the utilities themselves, understood that our proposal was reasonable, as was the purpose to which the money was to be applied.

Not only will the tax help the young and the long-term unemployed, but there will be £1.3 billion, of which my hon. Friend the Paymaster General and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment are now considering the allocation, for rebuilding and repairing schools and thus improving education for children.

The Government have also introduced measures to begin a programme to reduce the deficit—the massive debt—that we inherited because of the outgoing Conservative Government's mismanagement of the economy. It is necessary to reduce debt if we are to secure the stable platform that the country needs to build for the future.

A central part of the Bill is the measure to reform the corporation tax system. Lowering corporation tax rates by 2 per cent. for both large and small companies is one of the major reforms of the system and will help businesses to plan and to invest for the future. The Bill also contains measures to increase investment relief. Conservative Members either did not find that exceptionable or did not get round to tabling any amendments to it.

A central part of the Government's approach to taxation is the concept of fairness—a concept that the Conservative party does not always understand. That is one of the reasons for our reduction of VAT on domestic fuel to the lowest rate that European rules allow. The Bill also contains a number of measures designed to close tax loopholes and deal with abuses in the tax system. That clearly excited Conservative Members. Let me say this to them: did not their Government, under prompting, try to close some of the loopholes in the Finance Bill that was debated earlier this year? It must be the duty of any Government to ensure that there are no unintended abuses in the tax system and, if there are loopholes, to close them.

I appreciate that it can be galling for those who engage in tax planning and who legitimately advise people on how to take best advantage of the tax system to find that the Government of the day have shut off a particularly lucrative avenue. They must accept, however, that as taxpayers themselves they have an interest in ensuring that the Government are rigorous in their approach to the system and do not allow abuses to develop.

The Bill also builds on our commitment to the environment and the promotion of health. It largely implements our manifesto promises, on the basis of which we won the election.

I note that the International Monetary Fund, which is not noted for its support for our party in government, said that the new Government have made an excellent start and that we have set a high standard for our economic policies, aiming to maintain stability and foster long-term growth while seeking fairness and developing human potential. That does not strike me as too bad an assessment of what we have done, and it strikes me as an infinitely better assessment than anything that could have been said about many of the Budgets that have been introduced over the past 18 years.

This is a Budget for fairness. It is a Budget for opportunity. It is a Budget that will create the right economic conditions for investment, growth and job opportunities. The Budget, and the Finance Bill, will equip the country for the future and provide a solid foundation on which to build. That is why it deserves an overwhelming endorsement.

9.17 pm

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Bill was conceived in great haste and forced through on a timetable motion. Its long-term effects will be extremely damaging.

The Chancellor promised only one tax increase in the Bill: the windfall tax. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury made the extraordinary observation that the Committee had not debated the tax. I realise that he made only fleeting appearances during the Committee stage, but one of his hon. Friends really should have told him that we spent the whole of the first day debating the windfall tax, having spent a good deal of the Committee stage on the Floor of the House debating clause 1—the clause that introduces the tax. The right hon. Gentleman cannot even get the facts straight in regard to proceedings in Committee.

The central feature of the Budget, however, is the fact that, although the Chancellor did indeed promise us one tax increase, he delivered 17. Despite all the assurances and promises that were made before the election, which were repeated so often and emphasised so strongly, the Chancellor will raise between £5 billion and £6 billion every year, starting this year. We have the immediate imposition of extra duty on fuel—petrol, diesel and heating oil—which nets the Chancellor £750 million this year and is far more than he is giving away in the 3 per cent. cut in VAT on domestic fuel. We have the restriction on mortgage interest relief, the stamp duty increase, the abolition of relief on health insurance and many other increases.

Then, an hour or so ago, we again witnessed the extraordinary spectacle of the foreign income dividends saga. The whole world knows, even if the Government will not admit it, that the Government made fools of themselves over that. They blundered ahead, trying to abolish foreign income dividends in the teeth of advice to the contrary.

For the benefit of any hon. Member who has just joined us, I remind the House that foreign income dividends are a form of tax relief for British companies with large overseas earnings that was brought in by the previous Government. The Labour Government simply wanted to abolish them, but were soon told by those responsible that the damage would be immense. Instead of withdrawing the proposals, however, they continued to blunder on and, an hour ago, we were forced to adopt the proposals in the Finance Bill. The Bill that is about to pass out of the House of Commons contains a clause and a major schedule that do not contain the Government's intention—we have legislated to put into law something with which the Government disagree.

The Government were a victim of their own guillotine. Having admitted their mistake, they did not have time to correct it. That is not the way to legislate. We did our best in Committee, both upstairs and on the Floor of the House, and on Report to improve the Bill. Few Liberal Democrats were involved in our proceedings, although I see that the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), who was a member of the Committee, is here. I believe that they had three places on the Committee, but whole debates went by without any Liberal Democrat representative, so the burden fell on my hon. Friends. I can safely say on behalf of my hon. Friends that they did a great deal to try to improve the Bill but, despite their efforts, 14 clauses and three long schedules were left entirely undiscussed in Committee—24 pages of a Bill of slightly more than 100 pages went unexamined.

There was no filibustering—*[Interruption.]* If the Chief Secretary or his hon. Friends are alleging that there was, they are really saying that the Chairmen, one of whom is a member of their party, failed to control the Committee. The Chairmen did not allege that there was any filibustering, and there was none. There were long speeches because we had a lot to discuss. The Finance Bill is highly technical and it is no fault of my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) that he happens to know a great deal more about the subject than the—

Mr. Darling *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am responding to the Chief Secretary's points. One of his hon. Friends will have an opportunity to respond to the debate and we will listen to what is said. It is not the fault of my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford that he knows more about the Bill than the Government or that he spoke at some length to some of the amendments and clauses.

About a quarter of the Bill remained unexamined at the end of our proceedings. That created great difficulty, not only for the members of the Committee but for outside bodies. The Chief Secretary's extraordinary statement that the Bill's being bundled through the House was all according to precedent ignores the fact that outside bodies often want to criticise some of the proposals, recommend improvements and propose amendments, but they were denied the opportunity to do so.

We are complaining not just about the short time between the Bill going into Committee and its coming out of Committee, but about the fact that the Committee sat every day of the week. Many outside bodies, institutes and tax practitioners wrote in to complain.

I have before me a letter from the respected Association of Unit Trusts and Investment Funds, which complains that it was not seeking, in its suggested amendments, to wreck the Government's proposals. It says that it likes to work with Governments to avoid unintended consequences of legislation. It says that its members would not meet Ministers because there was no time. When its members asked to meet officials they were told that there was no point in talking to officials because Ministers made the decisions. So the only people worth talking to had no time for them. Association members were offered the chance to meet Ministers only once the Bill had completed its Committee stage.

That is what we are complaining about. It is an insult not just to the House but to taxpayers outside the House that they had no opportunity to be consulted or to recommend improvements to the Bill. I am surprised that the Government do not concede that. Hon. Members will remember that they came to office full of all sorts of stuff about partnerships, the need to listen—they were going to be a listening Government—and the need to consult. How hollow and hypocritical it sounds now. The way we have proceeded is practically a definition of how not to legislate. The Government have proceeded in haste, made mistakes, and pushed ahead in the teeth of well-argued opposition.

The proceedings have not been fruitless. We are not saying that the procedures of the House have not brought advantages, because we have established certain facts beyond dispute. One interesting fact the Government did not deny—and implicitly accepted—is that real expenditure in the current year is reduced by £3 billion, and by more than £5 billion in the next financial year, because of the extra inflation that is now built into the Budget arithmetic at least in part because of the inflationary effect of some of the Budget measures.

I mentioned the increase, from the date of the Budget, in petrol and heating oil duties, which, as we have already observed, feed straight into the retail prices index. That is inflationary for all public services and an additional imposition on their costs, but there is extra money for none of the public services this year or next. What the Government have done for next year is simply pre-allocate some of the reserve, which was part of the control total anyway. Not a penny piece has been promised for public services as a whole, but the inflationary consequences of the Budget and other measures that the Government have taken ensure that the real value of public expenditure is reduced by £3 billion in the current year. It was therefore useful to be able to establish beyond doubt that that is indeed the case.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My right hon. Friend will recall that the Chief Secretary has stated more

[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]

than once—he certainly did it in his opening speech—that the Budget is designed to bring growth and stability for the future. That must mean unemployment continuing to fall and investment continuing to grow.

Does my right hon. Friend believe that the way the Government have dealt with foreign investment dividends and advance corporation tax in respect of pensions is likely to lead to further investment by companies, which will now need to invest rather more in their employees' pensions thus depriving companies of investment in technology and machinery? How will he further respond to matters relating to foreign investment dividends, which will have a damaging effect on some big companies that employ a large number of people?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I agree with my hon. Friend. He will recall that, as an excuse for the timetable motion, the Government said that they wanted to get the Bill on to the statute book to end the uncertainty. In fact, as we now know, the Bill has created uncertainty. The status of foreign income dividends is in limbo. We do not know what the Government intend. All we know is that clause 36 is defective and inoperative.

My hon. Friend mentioned the effect on savings and pensioners. The central feature of the Budget is the huge and unexpected tax increase on pension funds and, therefore, on millions of savers. I use the word unexpected only because a few people might have believed the Labour party's promise not to increase taxation. They will have been alarmed and amazed by the speed with which the Labour party broke its pre-election promises.

Labour is hitting the very people who are attempting to provide for themselves and their families in the long term. The Government have the brass neck to call this a Budget for the long term. It is, in one sense: it hits the people who are saving for the long term.

To add insult to that injury, the Government deny that they are hitting pension funds at all. It remains Government policy, as enunciated by the Financial Secretary, that the withdrawal of £3.5 billion a year from pension funds is good for them. That is what she asserted on 3 July. No member of the Government has withdrawn or modified that remark.

The Budget will always be known as the pension tax Budget. If the Government believe that hitting pension funds to the tune of £3.5 billion a year is good for them, many other sectors of the economy must be hoping that the Government will not try to do any good to them in future Budgets.

We knew that the Labour party would break its promises on taxation. We did not know that they would break them within three months and on such a colossal scale. We and millions of people outside will never trust the Government on taxation again.

9.31 pm

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech during this debate. I begin by offering through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my gratitude to Madam Speaker for her comments on her acceptance of office. She spoke about my predecessor, the right hon. Michael Morris, who was the previous Chairman of Ways and Means and a Deputy Speaker. She spoke of his fairness in handling debates, and I echo those remarks. Many hon. Members have commented to me on his fairness, and in particular his handling of the Maastricht debate.

I wish to take this opportunity of placing on record my thanks to Michael Morris for his service to the House, and wish him and his family well for the future. He was a good servant of the House and I am sure that he will be missed in the Speaker's Office.

Michael is not the only Member for Northampton to have left his mark on the House, as previous post-holders have played their part in the history and administration of this place. I am honoured to count myself among their number.

Spencer Perceval entered Parliament in 1796 and remains the only Member for Northampton to date to hold the post of Prime Minister. He also has the unenviable honour of being the only British Prime Minister to be assassinated. He was shot in the Members' Lobby in 1812 by an angry farmer by the name of J. Bellingham.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: John.

Mr. Clarke: Indeed.

I appreciate that the folk of Northampton have strong views on parliamentary representation. Fortunately, Mr. Bellingham was not a local, but from the east coast.

Charles Bradlaugh was a radical Member, first elected in 1880, but it was six years before he was finally able to take his seat. Having asked to affirm rather than swear the oath on arrival, he was imprisoned in the Clock Tower and excluded from Parliament, and a by-election was called. The wise folk of Northampton refused to accept Parliament's view. They did not allow Parliament to tell them whom they should select or refuse, and continued to return Bradlaugh. Unlike people today, he faced elections in 1880, 1881, 1882, 1884 and 1885. The people of Northampton returned him each time, declaring, "It is up to us to decide whom we wish to represent us." Finally, the Speaker allowed him to take his seat in 1886. I am pleased to say that, in 1888, he secured the passage of a Bill legalising affirmation in both the law courts and Parliament.

Bradlaugh opposed the English oppression of Ireland. He also frowned on many aspects of the British empire, and was a great friend of India—of which I am sure many people are aware. He condemned war making and deplored malnutrition and neglect of the people. He was an advocate of land reform, and a staunch republican. There is much about Mr. Bradlaugh and his views that I find desirable today.

No history of Northampton parliamentarians would be complete without reference to Margaret Bondfield—who was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble). Margaret Bondfield became the first woman Minister in this place when she was appointed Minister of Labour in 1929.

Northampton was a seat of Parliament many times during the 14th century, and it has a proud history in defence of this place. During the civil war, the strong parliamentary garrison at Northampton led the assault at Naseby. Its shoemakers made the boots for Cromwell's army on the promise of payment following his victory. That payment was never received—I raise that issue now as we are discussing the Finance Bill, and the relevant Ministers are present. I understand that the Chancellor is looking to introduce legislation on late payment of bills. I believe that Northampton has a just case in that regard. Alternatively, if that is not possible, we would settle for a favourable standard spending assessment settlement next year.

My constituency of Northampton, South today comprises the southern half of the town and its surrounding green belt. It remains one of the fastest growing constituencies in the land. Despite a recent review, the electorate is 81,000 and rising. The population increases at an alarming rate: Northampton alone grows at a rate of 2,000 people per annum. The current population of 192,000 is expected to exceed 200,000 by the millennium.

Industry has changed over the years. It still includes the tradition of shoemaking, but is now much more diverse. Church's shoes are particularly noteworthy, and I am grateful to the company for its assistance during the election campaign. The shoes that I purchased from it are still going strong and have seen me through both the election campaign and my many trips around this place, during which I have got lost many times. I recommend that brand to hon. Members.

As I said, industry in my constituency has changed and is now more diverse. Carlsberg, Barclaycard and MFI are based in my constituency and have their headquarters in Northampton. We look forward to welcoming Panasonic to the fold later this year. Industry looks to the Government to strengthen the economy, and the measures in the Chancellor's Budget and in the Finance Bill will ensure that there is long-term stability and prosperity, rather than a cycle of boom-bust, for the first time in several years.

My constituents welcome that stability and prosperity, and they welcome the additional provision for the national health service and for education. Although I understand the reasoning behind some of the amendments placed before the House today—I was in the Chamber for a considerable time this afternoon, listening to discussions about the pensions issue—I am somewhat disappointed that none of the amendments mentioned from where finance would come to replace that which they would eliminate. I found it particularly difficult to accept Conservative Members' advice on pensions, when they sat back for eight years and did nothing about the mis-selling of pensions.

It is a great honour to serve the people of Northampton and its surrounding areas. It is the town of my birth and where I live and raise my family. I am proud to be the first member of the town for many years to serve the place of my birth. If we look through its history, we will see that not many people who were born and bred in Northampton have had the honour of serving that area. I am proud to be able to do that.

May 1997 was a memorable time for me, not simply because of the general election result, but because, as the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) will know, my team, Northampton Town, were at Wembley. The cobblers, celebrating their centenary this year, reached Wembley for the first time and were victorious. Their defeat of Swansea was not appreciated by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) who joined me on that day, but Northampton Town has now been promoted to the second division. That is proof positive that anything is possible under a Labour Government. As vice-chairman of the supporters trust, I wish the team well in their centenary year.

I also place on record my gratitude to my constituents, who have supported me very well since the election, and thank my family for their support.

I trust that the Bill will be passed and will bring about the financial stability for which the country cries out. On a personal note, my task is to serve my constituents with the same diligence and dignity that were evident in the careers of the Members whom I mentioned earlier. Northampton was described by Daniel Defoe as the handsomest town in England. I share that view, and I look forward to serving Northampton's people well into the new millennium.

9.40 pm

Mr. Brooke: On behalf of the whole House, I congratulate the hon. Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) on a perfectly excellent maiden speech. I suspect that he made it easier for the Deputy Speaker to decide who should be called when a wide range of hon. Members—I am not referring to myself here—got up in what is necessarily a truncated Third Reading debate.

The proceedings on the Bill have been notable for the fact—this is a tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb)—that Bognor has, I suspect, been mentioned more often than the City of London. I have visited Bognor, but the most vivid thing I knew about it before these proceedings was an exchange between the late Duke of Norfolk and someone who asked him whether, when he was senior steward at the Jockey Club, he ever had a flutter. He said that it was wrong that he should ever make a bet of any sort in that capacity, but it was true that Lavinia, the duchess, did occasionally have a bet. "Does she do well?", the person asked. "Not really," said the duke, "I had to sell Bognor last week."

The Government's defence for the truncated proceedings on the Bill—the 12 working days that it has taken—has been that they are guided and governed by precedent, and that we have had just as much time as in past years; but the fact remains that, by having to take it day after day without intermission, the outside bodies have not had the opportunity to contribute, nor necessarily has there been any margin for those of my hon. Friends who sat on the Committee to be able to absorb advice. Frankly, the test will be whether the Government, who have defended the use of 12 days this year, use the same technique next year. If they were to use it again next year, the City of London would have much more to say than perhaps it has had to say this year, in these circumstances.

The Chief Secretary alluded to the Treasury to the long speeches, and various references have been made to the fact that those speeches were not wholly satisfactory. One of the consequences of the long speeches of Conservative Members has been the nature of the interventions that they have provoked and prompted. The interventions of Labour Members on both the Back and the Front Benches have been the most revealing way in which they have shown that they have not fully understood the Bill.

I close, because I want other hon. Members to be able to speak in the debate, with one exchange that I had with the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, with whom

[Mr. Brooke]

I have had, broadly speaking, excellent relations throughout, although I acknowledge that there have been frissons.

On the subject of the windfall tax, I raised with the Economic Secretary the fact that one Minister had said that there was no difficulty at all in companies affected by the tax paying it out of their borrowings. Her response to me was that the Paymaster General had made it clear in other debates that the regulators had said that the utilities would have no difficulty in paying the tax without affecting their investments, but that was not the point that I was making.

The point that I was seeking to make was that it seemed to me to be an offence against the golden rule that the Chancellor had put forward in terms of his Budget that one should borrow for public purposes only if the money was to be used for investment and then oblige the utilities to borrow to pay the tax. That seemed to me an unfortunate imbalance and, although the Government have said that this is a one-off measure, I have an uneasy feeling that private borrowing will be used on future occasions.

I promised that I would be brief. I reiterate my congratulations to the hon. Member for Northampton, South.

9.44 pm

Yvette Cooper: I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) on his admirable maiden speech. This is my speech as a maiden from the Finance Bill, or perhaps a Finance Bill virgin. Friends and family asked, "So how was it for you?" I have to say that it was a strange experience.

I shall give the House some examples. I took Opposition Members extremely seriously when we began proceedings on the Finance Bill. For example, they said that they did not have enough time to discuss the important measures in the Bill which deserved deep scrutiny. I looked at the reports of the Committee's proceedings in *Hansard*. In my earnestness, I even timed some of the debates. I counted the column inches, subject by subject.

Taking an afternoon at random—not one of those that included some of the more strange and exciting flights of fancy around the world and around the various members of the family of the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell); it was slightly more specific—we had a two and a half hour debate, of which Conservative Members spent 40 minutes discussing how little time they had. That was 40 minutes that could have been spent scrutinising all kinds of measures that would have been important to the House. Instead, 40 minutes was spent discussing how little time they had. A further hour was spent on various trips around the globe, flights of fancy and matters adding, shall we say, colour, a full character list, a cast to the debate.

Taking a step back from the intricacies of the Finance Bill, which obviously needed to be scrutinised, we see the overall balance of the Finance Bill. I found two dividing lines between the Government and the Opposition. The first is fairness and the second is consideration for the long term.

On fairness, Opposition Members felt the need to defend tax relief for private medical insurance, something that helps only a tiny minority, rather than using the money to reduce VAT on fuel, something that favours everyone and that we can extend to all. The most important measure of all for fairness was the windfall tax, raising money to help the long-term and the young unemployed into work. Nothing could be more important to fairness and to helping people who are in most need of support, help and fair opportunities in Britain.

Then there was the long term. The Opposition tended to cluck and crow, and kept raising the issue of the long term. They said that the Government did not understand it. I found that the Opposition simply did not understand that the most important long-term issue for Britain and the British people is to get out of the traumatic long-term boom-bust cycle that has plagued the economy for so long, doing huge damage.

We saw that time and again in the debate about pension funds. Opposition Members simply could not understand that what matters for future pensioners is the long-term health of the entire economy; what matters is staying out of another recession, not swinging on the same old rollercoaster—up we go, inflation takes off, down we come again, and crash into a recession with repossessions and huge numbers of people losing their jobs and being forced on to the dole once more.

Opposition Members did not seem to take that seriously, but the Government are determined to do something about it. That is what the Budget is all about: that means the measure to give the Bank of England operational control of interest rates, measures for investment and measures to improve the capacity of the economy and to help the long-term unemployed back to work. All those things can help to improve the long-term sustainable growth rate of the economy.

That also means sorting out the public finances. I heard little about that from Conservative Members, yet sorting out the public finances and the level of borrowing in the economy are incredibly important matters, not only to encourage a balanced recovery, but to get it on a sustainable footing for the future—something that the Conservative Government failed to do.

After the last recession, borrowing rose to 7 per cent. of gross domestic product. That is a shocking level. Even next year, on the Conservative Government's forecast last November, borrowing would have been £12.2 billion, despite the years of economic growth. That is not a sustainable level. The Labour Government pledged to do something about it, and they are doing something through the Bill. The measures for contracting borrowing by £4.1 billion are important, yet we have heard little from Conservative Members about that or about what they would have done. All we heard was, "Why are you having a Budget? It is not needed." Presumably they would have been content with borrowing at unsustainable levels.

Conservative Members took the same attitude on individual measures throughout our debates. For example, they opposed the abolition of tax credits on advance corporation tax, but they did not tell us what they would have done to find that £3.9 billion next year. However, they were content with the cuts in corporation tax of £1.9 billion, but where would they have found that money? They supported the cuts in corporation tax, but not the measures that would raise the money to fill the gap. Time and again, Conservative Members opposed measures to cut borrowing, yet they said nothing about how they would fill the gap and tackle the problem of unsustainable borrowing.

That typifies the irresponsible, short-termist view of the Opposition. It is a shame. This is a constructive Finance Bill, and there could have been a constructive debate about the long-term future of Britain, something on which the Government place great emphasis.

It is astonishing how little Conservative Members have taken into account fairness and the issues that matter to people throughout the country. They have quibbled, moaned and whinged about bits and pieces here and there—

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Pensioners.

Yvette Cooper: If the hon. Gentleman wants to talk about pensioners, let us talk about the 15,000 pensioners in my constituency who were horrified by the way in which the previous Conservative Government treated them and their future. They were denied their full entitlement to benefits and denied help to get the extra income support to which they were entitled. Some 2,300 people in my constituency were mis-sold personal pensions—

Mr. Swayne: However much the hon. Lady wishes to return to better days and to bring back the past, I remind her that we are discussing this Finance Bill. Does she agree that pensioners, those approaching pensionable age and even those some years away from pensionable age who are making savings decisions, require, more than anything else, stability in their assumptions? This Budget has robbed them of any stability. Does she accept that the Budget will go down in history as one that attacks the saver?

Yvette Cooper: I am not trying to look backwards; I am trying to look forwards. The hon. Gentleman makes my point—pensioners need stability. They need to know that their pension funds will be worth something when they retire. What matters to them is the future performance of the pension funds. That performance depends on the state of the economy in which those pension funds are invested. That performance depends most of all on whether the companies in which they invest continue to grow and to prosper, rather than being slammed into a recession with the consequent destruction of capacity, of jobs and of those companies' value. The previous Government pushed companies and pension funds into such a recession.

The hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) is absolutely right: stability is what matters—for people of my generation, considering our future. What most jeopardises our security and future stability is the fear that we may lose our jobs because the economy again tumbles into recession—which has been caused by the boom-bust, irresponsible policies pursued by the previous Government. Ministers in the previous Government simply shrugged their shoulders and said, "The economy has nothing to do with us; it can carry on rolling up and down, up and down."

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: We have the strongest economy in Europe.

Yvette Cooper: The previous Government slammed our economy into a deep and damaging recession, in which people lost their jobs and their homes were repossessed. Conservative Members seem to shrug their shoulders over those consequences.

We now have a chance to do something about that cycle and to try to prevent it from happening again—to make a difference for the sake of our future, of our children and of our grandchildren.

Mr. Cranston: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Boswell *rose—*

Yvette Cooper: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Boswell.

Mr. Boswell: First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) on his maiden speech.

Mr. Livingstone: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is clear that my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) gave way to a colleague behind her—not to this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It was not clear to whom the hon. Lady gave way. I thought that she had finished her speech. I call Mr. Cranston.

Mr. Cranston: Does my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford agree that, in Committee, we heard nothing about issues of growth or, specifically, of social justice? We focused on the needs of only a few people who would be affected by withdrawal of relief on private medical insurance—a measure that will affect no more than 550,000 people.

Yvette Cooper: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. The Budget will be remembered for the contribution that it makes to jobs for the long-term unemployed. We are raising money and enabling people to get the jobs and the future that they need.

Future pensioners will depend most on stability, on jobs and on having the money to contribute to their own pensions—which they will not have if they are without a job and on the dole. Future and current pensioners care most about their children and their grandchildren and about jobs for them. Our Budget will get 250,000 young people off benefit and into work, making a huge difference to the 900 under-25s in my constituency who have no job and very little hope for the future. They certainly deserve better than they received from the previous Conservative Government.

The Budget has managed to provide extra resources for the health service, for education and for rebuilding our schools.

Mr. Ben Chapman (Wirral, South): My hon. Friend is talking about the welfare-to-work programme and how it will affect 250,000 young people. In my constituency, as many as 2,000 young people are striving to get work, and as many as one in four are out of employment. Many of our young people have no aspirations, no hope and no

[Mr. Ben Chapman]

opportunity of getting work, and they very much welcome the Budget. My entire constituency welcomes the Budget, and I applaud my hon. Friend's efforts to explain it.

Yvette Cooper: I thank my hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]* It is such a shame that Conservative Members want to cluck, crow and jeer when the subject under discussion is the future of the young unemployed and their opportunity to thrive and prosper—an opportunity not given to them by the previous Government but which they are being given by this Government, who believe in a future for the people of Britain.

9.59 pm

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) has clearly cast herself in the role of winding up the debate. No Government Front Bencher was prepared to do it, but the hon. Lady did not make too bad a job of it.

I attempted to congratulate my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke), on a most elegant speech full of wit and in which he paid a gracious tribute to Michael Morris.

I have very little time to say anything else about the Bill because of the operation of the guillotine. It is a Bill that should never have been. There might be some credibility in the proposal for the windfall tax, but there is no mandate for or credibility in the other 15—

It being Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [14 July] and Resolution [yesterday].*

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 336, Noes 168.

Division No. 74] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon
  (Dunfermline E)
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
  (Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
  (Copeland)
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
  (Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny
  (Wolverh'ton SW)
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George
(Hamilton S)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin

Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine
(Morecambe & Lunesdale)
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann
(Dewsbury)
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard *(Shef'ld Hallam)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James

Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey

Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Professor Steve
Wells, Bowen

Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Oliver Heald and
Sir David Madel.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

CONSOLIDATION, &c., BILLS

Ordered,

That Mr. Tony Clarke, Mr. Patrick Hall, Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews, Mr. James Plaskitt, Mr. Laurence Robertson, Mr. Adrian Sanders, Dr. George Turner, Mr. Andrew Tyrie and Mr. Brian White be members of the Select Committee appointed to join with a Committee of the Lords as the Joint Committee on Consolidation, &c., Bills.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

DEREGULATION

Ordered,

That Mr. David Chaytor, Mr. Iain Coleman, Mr. Brian Cotter, Mr. John Cryer, Mr. Stephen Hesford, Mr. Edward Leigh, Mr. Ivan Lewis, Mr. David Lock, Mr. Stephen McCabe, Mr. Gordon Marsden, Mr. Piers Merchant, Mr. Denis Murphy, Mr. Peter L. Pike, Mr. William Ross, Miss Geraldine Smith, Mr. Richard Spring, Mr. Anthony Steen and Mr. Ian Stewart be members of the Deregulation Committee.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

A1 (Dualling)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

10.15 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The debate—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Will Members leaving the Chamber do so quickly and quietly, please?

Mr. Home Robertson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The debate is primarily about road safety on the A1, but, before speaking about that, I must mention the tragic deaths of two young children crossing the B1348 from Seton Sands holiday centre on Saturday. That makes the point that road safety must be our overall concern in all aspects of transport planning. The accident was tragic, and there may well be a point that needs to be addressed on that spot, too.

It is extremely disappointing to have to come to the House tonight to repeat the case for dualling the remaining single carriageway sections of the A1 trunk road. The local case in East Lothian, the borders and Northumberland has been made conclusively on the fundamental grounds of safety and economic impact, and the national case for completing that missing link in the United Kingdom's strategic highway network is blindingly obvious.

I have been involved in the A1 Safelink campaign for nearly 10 years, and it was my understanding that the debate about whether to dual the A1 had been concluded in 1992, when Malcolm Rifkind and Lord James Douglas-Hamilton accepted the overwhelming weight of the argument and the unanimous pressure of public opinion on both sides of the border.

The debate had moved on to questions of funding and phasing, because the Government at that time and all other parties, both political and non-political, had accepted that the road had to be upgraded. So it is disappointing, to put it mildly, to run into unexpected problems with another Minister, this time from my own party.

The Government have announced a review of all major road schemes. Mysteriously, the Scottish Office has gone much further than both the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Welsh Office, by imposing a comprehensive 12-month moratorium which has stopped the next phase of dualling between Haddington and Dunbar, which should be going out to tender now, for construction next year.

That delay is very bad news, and it will almost certainly cost lives. What on earth is there to be reviewed? The A1 has been reviewed to a standstill, with reams of surveys and reports since 1989—and it all leads to the same inevitable conclusion. We have a severely congested and extremely dangerous single-carriageway bottleneck in the national dual-carriageway network, and the only solution is a phased dualling programme to complete the link between Haddington and Morpeth.

I had a meeting with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary on 2 July, together with a delegation from East Lothian council and the hon. Member for

Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). My hon. Friend told us that the review was not a Treasury-driven exercise and that it was to be a genuine reassessment of transport priorities. Fair enough—the Labour Government were elected with a specific commitment to review a number of programmes. However, we have not stopped building hospitals just because we are reviewing the private finance initiative system and we have not imposed a moratorium on water and sewerage projects while we review the Scottish water quangos—of course not. I do not understand why there should be a moratorium on the roads programme.

The other territorial transport Departments are approaching their highways reviews according to sensible pragmatic criteria. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales announced the Welsh roads review in a written reply on 3 July, he said:

> "The review will consider afresh all schemes currently in the Welsh roads programme with the exception of the A55 dualling across Anglesey. In that case, I have decided that the strategic importance of the improvement is so great that it must proceed without delay".—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1997; Vol. 297, c. *218*.]

I fully accept the strategic importance of traffic to and from Ireland via Holyhead, but I put it to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that the strategic importance of traffic between Scotland and the east of England is just as great.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Home Robertson: Very briefly.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for joining me and a delegation to English Transport Ministers about the English section of the road. Does he agree that as the A1 is also an important European route, it is absurd that we have to toil to persuade Ministers even to recognise that dualling projects already in the pipeline should go ahead?

Mr. Home Robertson: I am grateful to the right hon. Member. I was about to move on to the way in which the review is being approached south of the border.

When the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy), the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire and I met the Minister of Transport and the Minister for Roads in England last week, we were advised that the English review was split into two categories, with a comprehensive reappraisal for projects where there is any reasonable doubt, and an accelerated review, which was completed yesterday in very short order, for developments where a detailed review would be a waste of time and money.

I must put it to the Scottish Office again tonight that we could save a lot of aggravation and money, and probably several lives, too, if we were to adopt a similar accelerated review arrangement for projects such as the Haddington-Dunbar section of the A1.

At this stage, I should give a brief summary of the case for the phased completion of the Al east coast highway. From 1978 to 1983, the whole of the Scottish section of the A1 was in my constituency, and I became increasingly worried about the toll of accidents and the increasing volume of traffic on a road that still followed the line of the ancient Great North road. There was much correspondence with the Scottish Office about specific accident black spots.

By 1988, it was painfully obvious that we needed a co-ordinated approach to the problem from both sides of the border. We are not talking just about a local road south from Edinburgh to the borders and a local road north to Berwick-upon-Tweed from Newcastle upon Tyne. We are talking about one of the two major trunk roads linking Scotland and England.

I convened a meeting of the four hon. Members concerned, the seven local authorities and a wide range of other interests, which led to a detailed technical report produced by the three local highways authorities in 1989. That report was submitted to the Scottish Office and the then Department of Transport, and, after some fairly vigorous debates, including a massive public petition and powerful backing from the *Edinburgh Evening News* and the *Newcastle Journal*, the then Government accepted the case for completing the A1 link.

The Scottish Office has made a very good start by upgrading the road between Tranent and Haddington, and by completing all the preliminary procedures for the next section to Dunbar ready for work to start next year. Indeed, the first bridge has already been built, but today it looks depressingly like a bridge to nowhere. I hope that it does not remain like that for much longer.

I put on record my personal thanks to the Scottish Office staff and, perhaps surprisingly, to Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, the former Minister with responsibility for Scottish roads, for the excellent work that has been done, and for the two small sections that are under construction further south in my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, who I hope will be able to take part in the debate briefly. Lord James took a long time to grasp the case for the A1—that was so on other issues as well—but when he did accept the case, he certainly got on with the job in style.

Meanwhile, the volume of traffic is still increasing and the road will get even more congested as the economy improves and trade between Scotland and other parts of the European Union increases because the A1 is the main Euro-route to the east coast ports. Perhaps because of that, there is an abnormally high proportion of commercial traffic on the road.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Home Robertson: Very briefly, please.

Mr. Morgan: I totally accept the case for the A1 dualling, both on safety and strategic grounds. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that an equal case can be made for the A75, which is on a strategic Euro-route from Northern Ireland to western Europe? We are waiting not only for dualling, but for the drawing up of a route action plan and for the action that would follow from that plan.

Mr. Home Robertson: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's anxiety about the road in his part of the world. He must make his own case in his own way. The point is made that we need a different type of review of priorities for roads in Scotland.

[Mr. Home Robertson]

I was referring to the proportion of heavy goods vehicles on the A1. The abnormally high proportion of commercial traffic on that road tends to accumulate into convoys; and not just little convoys. These days, convoys of 60 to 70 vehicles are not uncommon on the single carriageway section of the A1. The situation gets far worse with even slower traffic such as caravans in summer time, exceptional loads, farm vehicles and traffic diverting from the A68 and other routes in severe winter weather.

It does not take much to bring the whole road to a standstill: that happens quite frequently nowadays. When it is at a standstill or very slow-moving, reckless attempts are made to overtake. All too often, that leads to violent, head-on collisions. There were 828 casualties, including 42 deaths, on the single carriageway sections of the A1 on both sides of the border between 1992 and 1995.

We do not need a review to analyse the situation: it is a severely congested bottleneck in the national highway system which will remain a running sore until it is dualled. There is no other way of resolving the problem, because there is nowhere else for the traffic to go. I should love to see more freight carried by rail, but it would be barmy to suggest that lorries should tranship their loads on to railway wagons between Prestonpans and Morpeth: it is just not feasible.

Speaking of lorry traffic, the Minister may know that I was a volunteer driver on Edinburgh Direct Aid convoys to Bosnia during the war there, and I found it rather embarrassing that one can drive from south of Ljubljana in Slovenia to Morpeth in Northumberland on dual carriageway roads, but Europe seems to come to an end when the road degenerates into an overloaded country track near the Scottish border. Foreign visitors must think that they are approaching a third-world country when they get to north Northumberland.

The economic case and the road safety case for completing the A1 are conclusive and overwhelming. The Government have inherited a phased scheme for upgrading the road, which specifically includes a fully prepared project for the section between Haddington and Dunbar, with £40 million in the budget to pay for it. We now face the threat of a delay of at least 12 months while the Scottish Office goes through the motions of reviewing the project again. That is absolutely dire news for everybody who has to use the road, and in particular for my constituents in the Dunbar area

There is worse to come, because a massive new landfill site will start operating this autumn just east of Dunbar. The Oxwellmains site will take all Edinburgh's domestic rubbish. Happily, most of that material will be transported by rail, but the Minister confirmed in a written reply on 17 July that the dump will generate 400 more lorry movements each week, which is 800 each-way journeys, on the single carriageway between Haddington and Dunbar, including the long, slow haul up Pencraig Hill.

East Lothian Council reluctantly gave planning consent for that road traffic on the understanding that the road was about to be dualled, and the Secretary of State has just amended the Lothian structure plan to confirm that dualling "is now in hand". Well, apparently it will not be in hand for at least another year, and I put it to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that he is adding insult to injury for my constituents and for many other people by stopping the upgrading of the road and sending convoys of trucks with rubbish from his constituency in Edinburgh to aggravate the congestion on the A1 in East Lothian. If the road is not to be dualled in short order, perhaps consent for road haulage to that dump should be suspended until the road is dualled.

Obviously the principal issues are traffic management and road safety, but there is also the small matter of keeping promises. I have been fighting for a safe A1 road for years, and I am not going to stop now that we have a Labour Government. I told my constituents before the election that the phased dualling of the A1 would not be delayed by Labour's roads review. When I made that statement, I was not speaking off the cuff; I was confident that I had authority from the relevant members of the shadow Cabinet to say that the A1 was one of a handful of roads that did not need to be reviewed again.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who was then shadow Secretary of State for Transport, wrote on 1 August 1994:

> "I have made it clear that the moratorium should not stop progress on some much needed schemes. Amongst those falling into this category I have specified . . . dualling the A1 between Morpeth and the border (Scottish roads being outside my brief). You can rest assured of my support—I have already explained this to George who shares my view".

That was a reference to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Robertson), then shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, who wrote to me on 29 August 1994 to confirm that,

> "as far as I am concerned from Berwick-on-Tweed northwards dualling is a major priority on the grounds of communication and safety".

My right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), then shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, wrote in similar terms in 1994, and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (Mr. Dewar), now Secretary of State for Scotland, had written to me at length as long ago as September 1991 to state his support for the completion of the dualling of the A1, I felt that I was on safe ground.

I repeat the case for the A1 and to remind my hon. Friend the Minister that clear assurances were given before the general election. I have already had a meeting with him in the Department, as well as private discussions, and I very much regret having to raise the matter in this way. This is one of those cases in which duty to constituents has to take precedence over party loyalty.

I make a final appeal to the Minister to conduct the Scottish roads review according to the same criteria as those applied in England and Wales. By all means let us have a full review of roads schemes where there is any doubt or controversy, but in cases such as the next phase of the A1, where there is neither doubt nor controversy, he should allow an accelerated review to avoid an expensive and disruptive delay which would certainly cost lives.

10.31 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am grateful to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) and the Minister for allowing me two minutes to speak in the debate.

I pay sincere tribute to my hon. Friend and constituent the Member for East Lothian, who took the lead in co-ordinating the Safelink campaign, of which I have been aware for 10 years. He deserves the credit for the considerable impact of that campaign, which was the single most important factor that led the Government in 1992 to accept the principle of dualling the road from Edinburgh to Newcastle in due course. He is therefore right to feel disappointed. He is also courageous, in that he has not spared the Labour Government's blushes, and has put his constituents' interests first tonight.

The problem is not local to East Lothian, but international. It has impact south of the border and in Berwickshire. The A1 is a European route, and for that reason, if for no other, it deserves special treatment, as is given to the A55 in the Wales review and to some English roads in the accelerated review. The hon. Member has made a powerful case over 10 years. I shall be disappointed if he does not get better consideration from the Minister tonight than he has had from Ministers since the general election. He deserves better, as do people in the Borders and south of the border.

10.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Chisholm): I join the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) in acknowledging the zeal and tenacity of my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) in his continued efforts to secure the upgrading of the A1. I welcome the opportunity to set out what has been done and to reiterate the Government's commitment and approach to the development of an integrated transport system in Scotland.

My hon. Friend's efforts have been remarkably successful. Since 1991, about £55 million has been spent on five new construction projects on the A1, the latest being the dualling of the Tranent to Haddington section, which was opened to traffic in November last year. Two further dualling schemes are under construction: Oswald Dean to Innerwick, and Lemington to Howburn, at a combined cost of more than £7 million.

The movements of lorries carrying waste to which my hon. Friend referred will be allowed only when the road improvements associated with the former scheme have been carried out. The vast majority of movements of waste will be, and indeed ought to be, by rail, and any changes to the consent are purely a matter for East Lothian council.

A route accident plan has been carried out over the past few years, costing a total of £180,000 to date. The plan has provided a number of engineering measures, such as junction improvements, signing and lining and the introduction of speed cameras. All those measures have resulted in a dramatic reduction in the accident rate on the route, particularly within the Scottish borders area. There is, of course, no room for complacency, but accident statistics show that the average accident rate on the A1 is now half the rate for trunk roads.

Further schemes are being prepared. Four minor schemes, for all of which draft statutory orders have been published, will continue. A major scheme between Haddington and Dunbar—to which my hon. Friend referred—has been the subject of a public local inquiry, whose report is awaited. Further procedural work on the scheme will, in common with other major schemes, be suspended to await the outcome of the review of the trunk road programme that I announced on 19 June.

The review is an important part of our approach to the development of an integrated transport system in Scotland. The trunk road programme inherited from the previous Government was not soundly based, and was unaffordable given the significant reductions made by them to roads expenditure over recent years.

Since announcing the Government's plans to conduct a review of priorities on the trunk road network, I have had the pleasure of hearing views, and learning about priorities, in relation to potential schemes in constituencies across Scotland. Only this afternoon, I met my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne) to discuss the A77/M77. I have also had meetings with others to discuss a number of schemes, including schemes involving the A830, the A96 and the A75. In fact, I think I could say that I have received more representations on roads than on any other subject since I became a Minister, although I deal with local government, housing and many other controversial matters.

My hon. Friend mentioned the decision of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales in relation to the A55. That decision clearly reflects his judgment in regard to all the factors that were relevant to the case, but let me establish what seems to me to be a simple fact and a fundamental difference. In Scotland, no one road stands out as everyone's No. 1 priority. It is different in Wales.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: I doubt whether the people in south and central Wales would see the A55 as a strategic priority.

Does the Minister agree that the dualling of the A55 has a severe effect on the traffic through Stranraer? Freight hauliers operating through Stranraer have already admitted that they are losing traffic to the north Wales route.

Mr. Chisholm: I do not want to be dragged into a debate about Welsh roads. I have quite enough to be going on with in regard to Scottish roads.

I have noted all the views that have been presented to me, but it is clear that the continued pressure for progress on all those routes—set against a background of the mismatch between the expectations that the previous Government encouraged, and the public expenditure plans that we inherited from them—underlines the need for a review of priorities.

My hon. Friend rightly said that it was not Treasury-driven, but the simple fact is that the previous Government's sums did not add up, and we must replace their make-believe road programme with a real one. Before any scheme is implemented in the future, it will have to demonstrate its viability against the criteria of accessibility, safety, economy, environmental impact and integration with other transport plans. It must be recognised that the previous policies of predicting traffic growth and providing roads to meet such predictions are, in the long term, financially, socially and environmentally unsustainable.

Mr. Home Robertson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Chisholm: I will take some interventions later, but, because there were two speeches, I should like to make some progress—I have a great deal of material to cover.

[Mr. Chisholm]

At an appropriate stage of the review, we will seek the views of a wide range of bodies including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, local authorities, the Confederation of British Industry and other transport and environmental interest groups on revised criteria for setting priorities. We shall aim to reach decisions on priorities as soon as possible.

Until then, work will continue on a number of major schemes that are already under construction and on the A75 the Glen and the A828 Creagan bridge schemes, which are at such an advanced stage of preparation that work was due to start on them this financial year. Even the scheme to complete the M8 motorway, which was scheduled for this year's programme, is being reviewed, although the advanced stage of tendering requires an early decision on whether it should proceed on that timetable or be deferred for consideration as part of the main review process.

No further statutory procedural work will be carried out on any of the remaining major schemes in the trunk roads programme inherited by this Government. The programme of minor schemes that deliver cost-effective safety improvements and the trunk road maintenance programme will not be affected by the review.

Mr. Home Robertson: My hon. Friend mentioned the M74: the A74 is already a dual carriageway, so to upgrade that to motorway standard is to ice the cake. My specific question is, what has happened to the money that was in the budget for the next phase of dualling for the A1? We understood that money was allocated and committed for the next phase of work between Dunbar and Haddington—obviously not the full £40 million, but the first bit of it at least. What has happened to that money? What is to be done with it during the 12-month delay?

Mr. Chisholm: Clearly, a lot of work needs to be done on the roads programme. This year, for example, there were massive cuts in the work for minor roads improvements, and we could easily spend all the money on that—I am not saying that we will, because final decisions have yet to be made about next year's budget. The money will be in the transport budget and I am sure my hon. Friend will agree that there is much work that can be done under that budget.

The dualling of the Haddington to Dunbar scheme will be examined within the context of the review. I know that my hon. Friend would like the Government to make an exception, and our reasons for not doing so do not imply any discrimination or prejudice against the scheme. The Government have a clear obligation to ensure that the review treats all roads in the same way. To make exceptions would seriously prejudice the conduct, validity and outcome of the review. We have departed from that approach in only one case—the long-term plans for the Kincardine bridge—because of the special nature of the operational concerns that arise.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has given an assurance that preparatory work within the Scottish Office will continue on the Haddington to Dunbar scheme, with the aim of allowing it to proceed without unnecessary delay should it be identified by the review as a priority. That work will cover issues that may arise as a result of the public local inquiry. In programming terms, there will inevitably be a delay in publishing the decision letter resulting from that inquiry and the confirming of the draft orders should that be the approved way forward. The preparation work within the Scottish Office will, however, aim to minimise that delay should the outcome of the review favour the early implementation of the scheme.

I can confirm the indication given to my hon. Friend that we consider that it remains a possibility that work could begin on the scheme in the next financial year, if it is confirmed as a top priority in the review.

As for finance, I have made it clear that the inherited roads programme was simply unsustainable. It would therefore be quite wrong to make assumptions regarding allocation of funds to major projects in coming years, or to anticipate the outcome of future public expenditure decisions and priorities. I am sure that my hon. Friend fully supports the Government's initiative in developing a coherent, affordable and environmentally sustainable roads strategy for Scotland, which will contribute to a properly integrated transport policy.

I stress that the review is not founded on an automatic assumption about cutting public expenditure on roads. For many people, especially in rural areas, the car is, and will continue to be, an essential form of transport. It is vital, however, that an integrated transport strategy is developed to offer the public real choices and protect the environment. The Government intend that the review will produce a future programme that is environmentally and financially sustainable, and integrated with our wider policies to reduce traffic growth and manage transport and traffic more effectively. Clear criteria for setting priorities for long-term road planning will result, and the application of those criteria will enable us to plan a roads programme based on an up-to-date assessment of Scotland's needs.

I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that the fair and correct course of action is to review the A1 within that context. I am sure that he will continue to remind us of the serious claims of the A1, of which I am also well aware.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 30 July 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Adjournment (Summer)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Janet Anderson.]*

9.35 am

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech—the first speech by the first Member of Parliament for the new constituency of Bedford.

The constituency is really made up of two towns, Bedford and Kempston. Bedford is the county town of Bedfordshire, and has been a centre of regional importance since Saxon times, if not longer. Kempston has been a village for most of its history, with evidence of Roman settlement. Bedford grew rapidly during the 19th century, and later physically joined Kempston to create a single built-up area, but an area with two distinct identities for the two towns—to the extent that Kempston has its own elected town council and mayor.

Unfortunately, those separate identities are not reflected in the official name of the constituency, and I shall therefore seek to change that name, to reflect the two towns of which it consists.

Bedford and Kempston is a good place to live and work, and a good place to represent. I am honoured to have been given the chance to serve my home town—if I may call it that, having lived in Bedford for 18 years, and in the locality for 34 years.

However, if I am still to be regarded by some as a migrant to the area—there are some old Bedfordians who might take that view—I am in good company, because Bedford and Kempston were founded on inward migration. Migrants came first from the surrounding villages when industry and the railways arrived in the 19th century.

Secondly, between the wars, the locally buoyant engineering and electrical engineering base attracted people from the depressed northern cities and from south Wales. Thirdly, after 1945, the towns expanded rapidly to their present size, attracting young families from London and elsewhere in Britain—and also from continental Europe, especially from Italy, Poland and the former Yugoslavia. People also came from the new Commonwealth—from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Caribbean.

There are people from more than 50 countries of origin living and settled in Bedford and Kempston. They have their various identities and, in many cases, their children, and their children's children, were born in the area and are growing up there. They are all part of the wider community and they contribute strongly to it.

That makes for a constituency rich in the diversity of its people and, therefore, strong in its potential for the many ideas and talents that we all need to bring to fruition if we are to work together to build a better world.

That ethnic diversity was recognised and respected by my predecessor for the Bedford part of the new constituency—Sir Trevor Skeet, who retired at the general election. I am pleased to acknowledge his role both as a constituency Member of Parliament for 27 years and as a man who displayed independence of thought. I wish him and Lady Valerie Skeet a long and happy retirement. I also wish to salute the service to Bedford of the two Labour Members of Parliament elected by slim majorities in 1945 and 1966—Tom Skeffington-Lodge and Bryan Parkin.

During the past three months, my constituents have shared with me some of their problems, hopes and fears. There are always many problems, of course, and most are connected with the wider social, economic and political realities.

In housing, for example, there is a constant expression of need associated with an inadequate supply of affordable housing to buy and to rent. There are those whose lives have been blighted by the deep injustices associated with the bureaucratic nightmare which is the Child Support Agency. There are many others whose lives have been reduced by the creaking welfare benefit system which locks so many people into a life of dependency and relative poverty, instead of offering a helping hand into education, training, skills and dignity.

I am sure that I am not alone in being told about the stresses and worries generated by the growing pressures on community and social services, the national health service and local schools, despite the very best efforts of dedicated staff. People are concerned about crime, vandalism, jobs, pensions and transport, but they also tell me that, since the general election, the mood has changed for the better.

There are still problems—there always will be—but there is now a feeling that there can be solutions. People are not displaying unrealistic expectations or a desire for magic instant answers, but they believe that we can make progress—a step at a time if need be—and for the many, not just the few.

People in Bedford and Kempston want to see smaller class sizes, quality child care and early-years education. They want lifelong learning to become a reality for all those people who have been denied it for too long. My constituents support the prospect of a revived NHS and they want to see fairness at work and a realistic minimum wage.

People support the measures to tackle unemployment and to boost investment by supporting business by helping people to train and improve their skills. Many of my constituents have made it clear also that they want this country to be positive in Europe and to play our part in fair trade and international co-operation, peace and justice. They want us to be active in cleaning up the global environment in our interdependent one world.

So many people who feel that they have been forgotten over the years—including pensioners and those with disabilities—are waiting with interest for the reviews of the benefits system, pensions and community care. If I may say so, I hope that my constituents will not just wait, but will have their say in the consultation process. In my

[Mr. Patrick Hall]

view, a wind of change is blowing through the country today. Expectations are rising, but with higher expectations comes the serious responsibility of the need to deliver. My constituents are patient and are prepared to give the Government a fair chance.

There are concerns about the effect of the strong pound on industry and employment, and about the consequences of the appalling state of the public finances which we have inherited and which point to further cuts in schools, hospitals and local council services. I urge the Government to be sensitive to those concerns and to help to minimise the damage before we get on to the long road to recovery outlined in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget.

There are concerns about traffic congestion and pollution, and I hope that local interested parties will respond to the consultation exercise on trunk roads in England, argue for measures that will help to complete the bypass in Bedford and Kempston and press more widely for improved rail services. With rising expectations and greater public interest in politics and our national life, it is now all the more important that we open up our democracy so that all voices can be heard. That means action on freedom of information, and parliamentary, electoral and constitutional reform.

Since the general election, this country has begun a great journey and we cannot turn back. I have no doubt that it will be a long and often difficult road, but it will be worth it. In common with the majority of the British people, most of my constituents offer their support and their good will to help to ensure, in the words of a former leader of my party, John Smith,

> "that the best of Britain is yet to come."

9.44 am

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): May I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) on his maiden speech? He spoke of his constituency with the intimacy which comes of long residence, and my right hon. and hon. Friends particularly appreciated his tribute to Sir Trevor Skeet.

I speak—unusually, from the Dispatch Box, in this debate—to raise the question of the Government's so-called ethical foreign policy and particularly its application to defence-related exports. I do so because there has been no previous opportunity to do so and because the Foreign Secretary has gone to extraordinary lengths to evade questioning on this topic.

Let me make it quite clear at the outset that the Opposition whole-heartedly support the view that this country should have an ethical foreign policy. We believe that we had an ethical foreign policy under the previous Government. In considering applications for export licences for defence-related equipment, for example, those responsible were required to take into account, among many other factors, the

> "behaviour of the recipient state and its human rights record."

Indeed, on many occasions under the previous Government, licences for defence-related equipment were refused.

The Foreign Secretary clearly intends to take a different approach—or at least he wants people to think that he is taking a different approach. First, with a flourish of trumpets, the Foreign Secretary issued his mission statement in the Locarno suite of the Foreign Office on 12 May. He described it as a new mission statement and said that it set out new directions in foreign policy. He said that he was setting a new direction for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

In the course of setting out these new directions, the Foreign Secretary put up a series of Aunt Sallies and proceeded to knock them down. He said, for example:

> "the Labour Government does not accept that political values can be left behind when we check in our passports to travel on diplomatic business."

But nor, as I have made clear, did any of my former right hon. Friends who served as Foreign Secretary since 1979 accept that. Nor do I.

The second occasion on which the Foreign Secretary raised the matter outside the House was on 17 July. In a speech entitled "Human Rights into a New Century" he set out a dozen steps to

> "carry through the Government's commitment to raise international human rights standards."

Most of these steps continue the policies of the previous Government. In many cases, the fact that they do so is openly acknowledged.

On Monday, the Foreign Secretary announced the criteria to be used in considering licence applications for the export of conventional arms under this allegedly new policy. Given the importance that the Foreign Secretary clearly attaches to the policy—and given the fact that there has been so much press briefing about it—one might have expected the announcement to be made by way of an oral statement to the House. One might have thought that the Foreign Secretary was proud of his initiative.

Not a bit of it. The announcement was smuggled out in a written answer to a question from the hon. Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms). There was no opportunity to question the Foreign Secretary and we are left to speculate on the meaning to be attributed to this delphic pronouncement.

Let us test it by reference to one of the more controversial cases in this field—the export of Hawk jets to Indonesia. The sale of those aircraft to Indonesia was initiated by the Labour Government in 1978, less than three years after Indonesian troops entered the capital of East Timor. However, as a senior member of the Government insisted to the *Financial Times* on 18 July:

> "there is no evidence that the aircraft is being used in East Timor. Our intelligence on that is very clear".

The Minister also said, in the same report in that newspaper:

> "the decision on Hawks should not be seen as a sign that new applications for similar export licences would be approved".

Why not, if they have not been used in East Timor?

Later briefing makes the tale even murkier. Foreign Office sources told *The Daily Telegraph*—according to yesterday's paper—that, after legal advice, it was decided that it was "unrealistic and impractical" to revoke export licences granted before Labour's election victory. They also said, however:

> "the Hawk jet deal would be still seen as acceptable under the new rules".

What we now have is the worst of all worlds—the minimum of clarity, the maximum of confusion. We are discussing not some academic paper, but a policy on which people's livelihoods may depend.

I hope that the Leader of the House will tell us at the end of this debate why it was "unrealistic and impractical" to revoke export licences granted before 1 May, if that indeed was the reason for their being allowed to continue. I hope that after the recess, the Foreign Secretary will make some effort to clear up the mess that his various statements have created. I hope that the country will note this sorry episode as yet another example of those warm words from Whitehall signifying nothing that are rapidly becoming the hallmark of this Government.

9.50 am

Mrs. Janet Dean (Burton): I am grateful for this opportunity to make my maiden speech. I have heard many excellent speeches by so many Members who, like myself, are new to the House. It seems strange that it should be such a daunting task when many of us have been used to speaking at council and public meetings in our constituencies. Some, like my colleague the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), could not wait to make their first speech. Others, like myself and my predecessor for the constituency, Sir Ivan Lawrence, chose to approach the task at a rather more leisurely pace.

Sir Ivan made his maiden speech on 1 May 1974, and went on to make the longest continuous speech on the Floor of the House in this century—some four hours and 27 minutes. I may have emulated him on the time that it has taken me to make my first speech, Madam Speaker, but I promise I will not follow his latter example, although I commend him for his fortitude.

Before the recess, I wanted to tell the House how delighted I am to have been elected to represent the Burton constituency. I came to live in the constituency in 1968, when I married my dear Alan, who was my inspiration in politics. In those 29 years, the people of the Burton constituency have shown me their warmth, friendship and support, and I thank them for the great honour that they have given me in electing me to the House. I must also thank those who worked so hard to get a Labour Member elected for Burton for the first time since 1945, when Arthur Lyne gained the seat for Labour.

Other Members for Burton have been named Bass, Evershed, Ratcliffe and Gretton. Yes, as the name of my constituency suggests, the largest town is that of Burton upon Trent, the home of brewing—the world capital of the brewing industry. Brewing grew up in Burton because the monks of the local abbey discovered the special qualities of the local well water. By 1880, there were around 40 breweries in Burton. Now we have four—Bass, Carlsberg Tetley, Marston's and the smaller Burton Bridge Brewery.

The brewers may not now be the major employer in Burton, but the breweries still encompass large areas of the centre of the town. Many fine buildings owe their legacy to the brewing industry. The history of that industry is best displayed at the Bass museum, the home of the famous Bass shire horses.

Burton upon Trent has many qualities, including the Trent washlands, which provide a uniquely attractive informal parkland in the centre of the town. Burton upon Trent has its problems, however. It has the highest unemployment rate of all the main settlements in Staffordshire, and six of the most deprived wards in the west midlands outside the conurbation are in the town centre.

I commend the local authorities and industries and all those who are working closely in partnership to try to overcome the high unemployment levels and improve the quality of life in those wards. Single regeneration budget and European regional development fund moneys are particularly important to the regeneration of the centre of Burton, as are the Government's welfare-to-work proposals.

We all know that there is work that needs doing, that there are homes that need improving and insulating, and people who need to use their abilities and develop their talents. In my constituency, 366 young people who have been unemployed for more than six months, and 489 long-term unemployed will benefit from the Government's policies. The 16,500 pensioners in the constituency will benefit from the cut in value added tax on fuel and, whether my constituents live in Burton upon Trent, the villages and rural areas or our other town of Uttoxeter, they now have new hope for the future.

I mentioned the breweries in Burton, but Uttoxeter is famous for its race course, one of the best small courses in the country. Four breweries and a race course—can any other constituency boast of such icons of leisure? Uttoxeter is always classified as a market town, but has always been more than just that. It has always been a working town as well and has weekly cattle and retail markets, which attract visitors from a wider area. Its industries have developed from the agricultural area by which it is surrounded.

Uttoxeter used to be the home of Bamford's agricultural machinery company and a dairy that, even in the days before refrigeration, sent milk by rail up to London. Sadly, both Bamford's and the dairy closed in the 1980s and Uttoxeter lost many local jobs. Elkes Biscuits has continued to grow, however, and is now the largest employer in the area.

The town of Uttoxeter has not only a heritage centre but a memorial to Dr. Johnson. Hon. Members will know of Dr. Samuel Johnson's skill in compiling the first dictionary, but they may not be aware of his connection with Uttoxeter. His father ran a bookstall in the marketplace. One day, when he was ill, he asked young Samuel to stand in for him. Dr. Johnson refused; so, when he was 70, he returned to Uttoxeter and, as an act of penance, stood bareheaded in the rain.

I am not too sure what Dr. Johnson would have thought about the election of a woman Member of Parliament, or the fact that there are now 120 of us in the House. He was known to make disparaging remarks about women. One of his most generous was:

> "I am very fond of the company of ladies—I like their beauty . . . and I like their silence."

I am unsure whether Mary Queen of Scots was kept in silence, but she was certainly imprisoned in Tutbury castle for 18 years. Tutbury is a charming historic village, which is famous for its Tutbury crystal. Close by, near the village of Hanbury, is the site of the biggest explosion ever to take place in this country. The Fauld explosion on Monday 27 November 1944 was caused by an underground bomb store exploding. A farm house and other buildings just disappeared, and 70 people were killed.

There are many attractive villages in my constituency: Marchington; Draycott; Newborough, with its well dressings; and, to the north, Ellastone, Stanton and

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Mayfield, which border Ashbourne and the Peak district. The rural areas are not without their problems; the six most northerly parishes are part of the SRB 5 area, and the BSE crisis caused much distress to many of my constituents.

One of the greatest success stories is the JCB factory at Rocester. It is set in superb grounds, with lakes, statues and a vast complex of buildings that blend in with the countryside around them. The company is world renowned and has become a symbol of British industry at its best; it has invested in its plant and developed other factory sites around Staffordshire, including one in Uttoxeter, and continues to develop new machines to meet the needs of customers throughout the world.

Next door to Rocester is the pretty village of Denstone, which is the gateway to the Churnet valley and Alton Towers. I am lucky to represent an area of such diversity and I look forward to continuing to work with all those who are involved with the communities in the Burton constituency, including the voluntary sector and our schools, which have welcomed the extra money in the Budget. I will work with local authorities and businesses.

My constituency is truly in the heart of England, ideally situated for inward investment and industrial and commercial development. Now that I have taken hon. Members on a tour of the delights of Burton, I hope that I will have whetted their appetites and that, during the recess, some might think it an ideal spot to visit; whether at the world barrel rolling championships at the Burton festival in September, or at the races in Uttoxeter, they will be given a very warm welcome.

10.1 am

Mr. Thomas Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) on her maiden speech, which was thoughtful and composed; she gave us many reasons to visit her constituency, not least the breweries that are based there, and I am grateful to her for not emulating her predecessor by talking for four hours or more.

I should declare an interest in my topic, albeit a non-pecuniary one. I want to discuss the accident and emergency unit at St. Helier, which is the local hospital at which our first child was born two weeks ago. In the past three years, the hospital has been in and out of the news and in the public eye.

Some hon. Members may remember a story that appeared six or nine months ago about a patient who spent 72 hours waiting on a trolley before being moved into the hospital proper. A petition calling for the A and E unit to be kept open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, was signed by 2,500 local residents, as the unit was having to shut its doors at peak times because of overcrowding.

There is no doubt that conditions at the A and E unit will improve, as an extension is being built, but unfortunately, according to the nurses there, it is a case of too little, too late, and they are expected to ballot for industrial action within the next couple of weeks; they have already received approval from the Royal College of Nursing council to go ahead.

I am afraid to say that I am assured that the results of the ballot are a foregone conclusion: the nurses will take industrial action. I hasten to say that the action will be limited and that there is little, if any, risk to patients. The nurses intend to withdraw their good will, which means that they will not work during lunch breaks, as they currently do, or provide cover at short notice.

Why are the nurses taking action? It is not about pay and conditions at the hospital but about their concerns about the quality of care that patients are receiving at the A and E unit. They are worried because the out-patients department is being used an overspill area for the A and E unit. Even the children's waiting area—there is a separate children's unit—is being used for adults because of overcrowding.

The action could start within the next four weeks. I raised the matter with the Secretary of State for Health, but I am afraid that his response was quite blunt: to paraphrase, he said that it was nothing to do with him and was a matter for the hospital management. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) raised the matter at Prime Minister's Question Time and got a more conciliatory response, although I think that the underlying message was the same: that it was down to the hospital management.

I accept that the hospital management bears the brunt of responsibility, but the St. Helier trust had a couple of million pounds cut from its budget recently and the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority, the main purchaser in the area, has a deficit of more than £10 million, so neither of those organisations will be in a position to help the A and E unit or the nurses, and I am afraid that that leaves the Secretary of State for Health in the firing line.

I hope that we will not be told about jam in the next financial year. The A and E unit is under threat this year and the nurses propose to take industrial action this summer—not next year, but probably within the next four weeks. I hope that the Leader of the House will convey my great concern to the Secretary of State; there is still time for him to take action. He can still take an interest in the dispute and help to secure a painless outcome for patients, staff and management at the hospital.

There is still time to stop the RCN taking action. It should be noted that it would be the first time that the RCN has taken action because of concerns about the quality of patient care. I hope that my plea will not fall on deaf ears and that the Secretary of State will show that the national health service really is safe in the new Government's hands.

10.7 am

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I want to talk about the future of energy provision, and to press for a full debate on a comprehensive energy policy. If we are to plan for the 21st century, we need a fuel policy to secure energy supplies for future generations. Our approach must be built on a firm foundation and we must put the current energy supply policy in a proper perspective.

Because of shortness of time, I intend to focus my remarks on the electricity supply industry. Electricity is supplied from many sources, and I want the various means of generation to continue, but the major source is coal. That is understandable because of our vast coal reserves. At present, about 45 million to 50 million tonnes are produced annually. It creates about 66,000 jobs, which is a substantial contribution to our economy. The distortion in the electricity regenerating industry and the way in which fuel is used for generating electricity gives rise to two prime concerns. One is subsidised foreign coal and the other is the bias in favour of gas.

I am not asking for favours for coal—I am asking for fairness. Instances of unfair competition have been identified and form the subject of negotiations. Subsidies are a case in point. Government Departments are involved. The artificially low price of electricity generated from gas significantly distorts the generation of baseload electricity in favour of gas at the expense of coal.

The *Financial Times* of 17 June reported that the German coal industry received substantial subsidies, which resulted in the

> "'dumping' of German anthracite in the British market."

Germany captures a quarter of the United Kingdom's 400,000-tonne-a-year market for anthracite. Mr. Keith McNair, the chief executive of Celtic Energy, claimed that German producers were selling their coal for less than the cost of its production. According to the report:

> "Bonn spends about DM10.3 billion in subsidies to keep 85,000 miners employed in the coal industry. . . . it costs German producers up to £100 a tonne to mine and ship anthracite."

It sells in the United Kingdom at £75 per tonne, and the market price ranges between £85 and £100 per tonne.

There is thus a bias in favour of German coal which affects the United Kingdom coal market. The Germans argue that if they had to run down their coal industry as a result of the withdrawal of subsidies, Germany would lose its position as a leading manufacturer of mining equipment. Our engineering industry is also affected, because German mining equipment manufacturers are subsidised. That is why we should have a major debate on the coal industry.

The inability of coal to compete with gas on a fair and level basis results from significant distortions, which result in electricity generated by gas being bid by electricity generators into the baseload generation market in the electricity pool of England and Wales at artificially low prices as a result of uneconomic bidding behaviour, which displaces coal-fired generation plant in favour of gas. The crucial part of bids for fuel is the base load principle. As the generating industry is biased in favour of gas, coal-fired generators cannot bid for the base load and have to bid into the mid-merit market. That is unfair competition.

All the coal industry is asking for is the opportunity to bid to supply fuel for baseload generation. That is not unreasonable.

Mr. Brake: Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the implications of an increase in coal-fired generation for the Government's carbon dioxide emission targets?

Mr. O'Brien: I will deal with that point, but my point is to underline the unfairness of subsidised coal and the bias in favour of gas created by not allowing coal to tender for the baseload.

The United Kingdom coal industry accepts its responsibility to reduce emission levels by using clean coal technology. It will be more than able to make its contribution to the Government's commitment to a 20 per cent. reduction on 1990 levels of carbon dioxide by 2010. In order to meet that target, we need to start investing in clean coal technology now.

The coal industry is geared up for the introduction of clean coal technology. I am a former mineworker and a member of a mining community. We accept that the coal industry has a responsibility to promote clean coal technology. We have the means. What we need now is the resources to help us to move in that direction.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry has said that an acceptable energy policy must encompass three watchwords—diversity, security and sustainability. Diversity can be defined in principle as a fuel mix, not a monoculture or duopoly based on one or two sources of energy. Today's mix of gas, nuclear and coal gives us that diversity. A dash for gas at the expense of coal would make us overdependent on one fuel. The coal industry accepts the need for diversity. We are asking for the opportunity to play a full part in electricity generation.

Security can be defined as the need to ensure that the country is not dependent on imported energy. United Kingdom gas reserves are limited, and it is estimated that they will run out early in the 21st century; yet coal is in abundance here in our own country.

A sustainable energy policy will ensure that future generations have access to competitive sources of energy that can be produced in an environmentally acceptable way, using clean coal technology. It is accepted that the non-fossil fuel levy will be dispensed with in a few months' time. Some of the resources could be used to develop clean coal technology. That would give us the means to produce electricity from coal while meeting the emissions levels requested by the Government.

The non-fossil fuel levy has been used to support nuclear power and the development of renewable sources of energy. If we can channel some of those resources into clean coal technology, I believe that we could create a balanced system of energy provision for the future. If we are to have a comprehensive energy policy that makes use of the diverse fuels available to us, we must consider the use of coal as a serious option. There is an urgent need to address that matter, because, although the coal industry is efficient and a success story, that cannot be maintained unless we consider the use of subsidies, the inherent unfairness of the comparative prices of gas and coal and the use of clean coal technology.

I appeal to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to provide time in the near future for a full debate on a comprehensive energy policy. Hon. Members would then have the opportunity to express their concerns either for or against the arguments that I have raised. I rest my case.

10.21 am

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I, too, extend my congratulations to the hon. Members for Burton (Mrs. Dean) and for Bedford (Mr. Hall) on their interesting and informative maiden speeches.

I was particularly interested in the speech of the hon. Member for Bedford, because I well recall serving with Sir Trevor Skeet in the Committee on the Electricity Bill, which privatised the industry. I noted his great expertise in nuclear power and all matters relating to energy.

I understand that there was some dispute locally about whether Sir Trevor should stand for re-election in 1992. I wrote to the *Bedford Echo*—I believe that that is its

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title, but the hon. Gentleman can correct me if I am wrong—to say what a tremendous job Sir Trevor had done in that Committee, and I explained that the expertise of senior Members is valuable to the House. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is fortunate that Sir Trevor decided to retire at the previous election and did not contest the seat.

I wish to raise issues relating to statutory instruments, or secondary legislation, and if time permits I would also like to say a word about the threat behind vitamins. I should like to discuss secondary legislation wearing my hat as the Chairman of the JCSI—the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments—and Chairman of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments. There are three areas of concern which those Committees are currently considering, which I wish to raise with the Leader of the House and bring to the attention of hon. Members.

The first relates to matters outstanding from the previous Parliament. The second concern relates to issues that are the subject of current debate, and the third relates to issues of concern for the future. We are considering them at a time when the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of the Commons is considering certain recommendations, and there is the strong possibility of a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly. I put it to hon. Members that there has never been a better time to consider such matters.

The outstanding issues from the previous Parliament relate to the scrutiny of delegated legislation and statutory instruments derived from European legislation. The Procedure Committee, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery), published a report in June 1996 on delegated legislation, which drew attention to the deficiencies in the current system of consideration and scrutiny of statutory instruments.

The report recommended that the praying time, the time to object against negative instruments—there are, of course, negative and affirmative ones, and negative instruments do not necessarily go into Committee—should be extended to 60 days. It also recommended that a Standing Order should be introduced to prevent the House from taking a decision on any instrument until the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments had completed its consideration of it.

Thirdly, and most importantly, it recommended that a new Select Committee should be established to identify which of the many instruments laid before Parliament involve important questions of policy and should therefore be drawn to the special attention of the House. I draw that recommendation particularly to the attention of the Leader of the House.

That sifting Committee would go some way to filling what has often been identified as a gap in the process of scrutiny of instruments. The JCSI is only empowered to look at the vires or the legality of instruments, rather than consider their drafting or their merits. I must tell the right hon. Lady that a Government response to that report is still awaited, and perhaps she may care refer in her reply to her current deliberations and whether those points have been taken into consideration.

The second outstanding matter that has exercised the Committee and which is the subject of considerable debate is instruments derived from European obligations. In the same report, the Procedure Committee recommended that statutory instruments made under the European Communities Act 1972 should be colour-coded or marked in some way, to make their derivation easily identifiable by hon. Members.

Secondly, in a report on European business, which was published in March 1997, the Committee made further recommendations that the proposed sifting Committee on statutory instruments should be empowered to look at how Whitehall Departments implement directives in United Kingdom legislation. That is a topical issue, because many of my hon. Friends might say that Whitehall is attempting to ride roughshod over the wishes of hon. Members and force matters that should not be forced.

That is a matter of concern to the JCSI because of gold-plating—jargon for the over-implementation of European legislation—and the sheer number of instruments which create offences, and are unsatisfactorily drafted in terms of standard United Kingdom legislative practice. What proposals does the Leader of the House have to implement the Committee's recommendations relating to European legislation?

The current debate on delegated legislation relates to devolution. According to the Government's proposals for Scottish devolution, there are many issues that we must consider relating to statutory instruments. I give the right hon. Lady notice that there should be a separate debate in the autumn on secondary legislation.

The devolution of power to Scotland raises issues to do with how the Scottish Parliament will make and scrutinise secondary legislation. What will be the relationship between any Committee established by the Parliament for this purpose and the Joint Committee of this House?

The Scottish Parliament will create, in its legislation on devolved—non-reserved—areas, new powers to make subordinate legislation, exercisable by Ministers of the Scottish Executive. According to papers already published, the Scottish Parliament will constitute its own Committees to scrutinise subordinate legislation, whether made under existing Westminster Acts or future Scottish Acts. The Westminster Parliament's Joint Committee, the JCSI, and the Select Committee, the SCSI, will, I infer, scrutinise delegated legislation on reserved matters; but that is not clear.

It is not just the Midlothian question that is unclear—there are many other unclear issues at stake.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Tredinnick: I am pleased to see my hon. Friend nodding assent.

The sheer volume of secondary legislation passing through this place is staggering. I have already, for instance, referred to the amount of European legislation.

Will the JCSI check the Scottish Parliament's statutory instruments to see whether they are legal and free of conflicts with primary legislation; or will statutory instruments go straight off to Edinburgh, where it may be found that they conflict with current law? This is a technical matter which gives rise to great concern, and some thought must be given to it.

The other devolution proposal, for a Welsh Assembly, is quite different, but just as complicated. There is no easy way out. Just as we found in 1979, when the autumn debates begin, it will be seen that nothing is going to be easy. The fact that the Labour Government have thus far allocated 48 hours of debate will not serve them well, either. In 1979, there were 47 days of debate on the Floor of the House, not to delay proceedings but to examine all these questions. In the end, there was no solution, which is why the legislation fell. Curtailing debate this time will not lead to a solution.

I do not, however, intend to be sidetracked today. The Welsh proposals for the scrutiny of secondary legislation by the Welsh Assembly are, unlike the Scottish proposals, set out in some detail in the White Paper. The Assembly—it will not be a Parliament—will be able not just to make but to amend and reject secondary legislation. Its Committees will also be able to consult, and take expert advice, on draft orders. The power currently possessed by the Secretary of State to revoke, replace or amend secondary legislation passed by this House will be given to the Assembly.

How will this work in practice? What are the implications for the relationship between Westminster and the Assembly? What are the implications of this extension of powers for the scrutiny process at Westminster?

The Welsh Assembly will be a deliberative body; it will inherit executive powers from the Welsh Office, including the power to make subordinate legislation. Hence the Assembly, under Westminster legislation and vires, will make secondary legislation. If that secondary legislation is arguably ultra vires, it will be referred to the Privy Council's Judicial Committee. Is that the Government's intention? Do they plan to let the Privy Council sort out these matters? That, at any rate, is how things stand now.

The Committees of the Assembly will prepare the legislation, but the Assembly itself will approve and make it by order. Scrutiny of secondary legislation will be done apparently by a secondary legislation Scrutiny Committee of the Assembly, considering first draft orders. But implementation of the UK's European obligations will remain at Westminster—or will it? We do not know. It is yet another grey area. I am sorry to burden the Leader of the House with so many grey areas, but we really do need answers, faced as we are with complex legislation which, some would argue, is about the break-up of the United Kingdom. Indeed, it may lead to precisely that.

These are not minor issues relating to a particular Bill or order. They relate to the whole principle of the government of these islands. They refer back to the unravelling of decisions made, I think, at the time of the Act of Union in 1704—although I am not an historian, and I stand to be corrected by my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack).

Sir Patrick Cormack: Seventeen hundred and seven.

Mr. Tredinnick: I am grateful. I spent some time with my hon. Friend in the last Parliament on parliamentary business, and I learned then of his expertise.

The question remains: will responsibility for the scrutiny of instruments implementing our European obligations remain with the JCSI? Will scrutiny of statutory instruments made under transferred powers be done by the Welsh Scrutiny Committee? Will other statutory instruments remain the responsibility of the Joint Committee? This autumn, we need a debate on the whole issue of statutory instruments. It would be a grave mistake not to consider it.

My final point on devolved secondary legislation concerns the future of the European convention on human rights. It will have an impact on the exercising of powers to make delegated legislation—not necessarily a well-known fact.

We need to know what consultation there will be on issues of parliamentary scrutiny in this area. We need to know more about the suggestion that either a Joint Committee of both Houses or the existing Joint Committee should examine the matter. Do the Government propose to set up a new Committee? Will it be a Sub-Committee of one of the newly established Committees; or will members of the Joint Committee which I chair have this responsibility? I should like an answer from the right hon. Lady.

I want to raise one other subject entirely unrelated to statutory instruments. I do so as the long-serving—almost 10-year—treasurer of the parliamentary group on alternative and complementary medicine. My point relates to the Government's decision to withdraw or ban a range of vitamin B6 supplements, which, among other things, help with pre-menstrual tension, heart disease and a range of other ailments. I say this against the background of a tendency to turn ever more to alternative medicine and away from conventional medicine.

The fact remains that the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has decided to ban higher dose supplements. Time prevents me from going through all the arguments today, and I know that other colleagues want to speak—but this issue, I warn the Government, will not go away.

If MAFF wants to expand its postroom, fine. Thousands of letters will be pouring in on this issue. The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment has taken the soft option, and has insisted on pills of an unnecessarily high degree of safety. That has enraged people in the world of alternative medicine.

In all my time running the secretariat for the parliamentary group, I have never come across a Government decision so at variance with so much professional thought in the industry, and so annoying to so many people and practitioners.

In the previous Parliament, the Government had to deal with the herb comfrey, and we won that case. The Minister of State is in his submarine and going straight for the bottom, because this issue will not go away. I implore the Leader of the House urgently to tackle him and ask him to review his decision. I should be most grateful if she did so.

10.39 am

Mr. Jim Dobbin (Heywood and Middleton): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech during this general debate. I am pleased to be making it before the recess, because that means that I can go home feeling that I have achieved a little. I have to be careful what I say, because I believe that you had a connection with part of my constituency in earlier days.

My constituency is one of those that make up the metropolitan borough of Rochdale. Having been subjected to boundary changes, the constituency of Heywood and Middleton now incorporates the wards of Castleton and

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of Norden and Bamford. When it was in the constituency of Rochdale, Norden and Bamford was probably an 8,000 Conservative block vote, but at the last election there were some major switches, and in parts of the ward we took up to 40 per cent. of the vote. Both Castleton and Norden and Bamford were formerly part of the Rochdale constituency.

It is said that Heywood was created in the 18th century by the father of Sir Robert Peel. It has a strong sense of working-class history and tradition. Today, Heywood is an expanding centre for the distribution industry on one side of the M62 and close to the M66, which motorway has recently been under review but is now due to be completed, thanks to the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. It is a most important road link around the Manchester conurbation.

Heywood has many links with historical events and people, and certainly has dramatic links with this House. Peter Heywood of Heywood hall is credited with being one of those who, on 4 March 1605, snatched the lantern from the hand of one Guy Fawkes. Right hon. and hon. Members therefore have a former constituent of Heywood to thank for the preservation of this democratic establishment—I nearly said a former constituent of mine, but that would have given away my age. The lantern is on show at the Ashmolean museum in Oxford.

A descendant of Peter Heywood, also called Peter Heywood, was a midshipman on the famous ship, the Bounty. It is recorded that he was vindicated of mutiny, as one would expect of a fine, upstanding constituent of that town.

To the south of the M62 lies Middleton. Samuel Bamford, one of the great political poets and reformers, led a contingent from Middleton to Manchester, where a number were murdered at Peterloo in 1819.

I represent two wards in Rochdale, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Lorna Fitzsimons), my colleague and neighbour, on her tremendous win in the general election. Rochdale has the distinction of being the birthplace of the Co-operative movement, which recently celebrated its 150th anniversary. As recent leader of Rochdale council, I am proud to be a Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament.

I am proud of the radical traditions and politics of my constituency, which I inherited from my predecessor Jim Callaghan—little Jim Callaghan, known widely in the House as "Gentleman Jim". He spent 22 years in the House, and was recognised throughout the constituency as a hard-working Member who built his majority from 500 to more than 8,000. In this year's general election, the majority was 17,500. Jim was always loyal to his constituents and to his party, and he left the House knowing that he had done a good job.

Before him, Joel Barnett, now Lord Barnett and a former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, served the people of Heywood with great distinction, and is remembered with great affection. I can never fill the shoes of my two eminent predecessors—I can merely try to do my best.

Having come from local government, I judge much of the legislation introduced in the House by the effect it will have on local government, services to local communities and the local economy, because that is where the people will measure its impact. The Government's commitment to schools, raising standards, smaller class sizes and repairing school buildings will be most welcome in my constituency, where many classes contain more than 30 pupils and many schools are in a state of disrepair.

I especially welcome the Government's early decision to fund a new hospital for my constituents based in Rochdale. The proposed new deal on welfare to work is a real bonus for the area, and my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale, other partners, represented by the local training and enterprise council, the chamber of commerce, business link and the council, and I have already produced a scheme that I hope the Minister concerned will find exciting. Allowances for small business and the release of capital receipts will clearly benefit the local economy. I am so far pleased with the contents of the Budget.

However, I have for some time been concerned about the links and the relationship between central and local government, which have deteriorated in recent years. The debate on the proper relationship between central and local government is not a new one: its origins in this country date back to the middle ages and the territorial conflicts between the monarchy and nobility over the relationship between the Crown and its most powerful subjects. The compromise reached with the signing at Runnymede of the Magna Carta, which laid the foundations of our so-called unwritten constitution, can be seen as the forerunner of modern conflicts in local and central relations.

We need to put the relationship between central and local government into perspective. Despite the supremacy of Parliament, which was established during the English civil war in the 17th century, there has always been an uneasy relationship with the regions and localities; but, even without a written constitution, the importance of local government and administration has been acknowledged. Today, we need to define a new relationship with the centre that meets the challenges of the next century.

Our role in a new Europe and our responsibilities to our own citizens also need to be redefined. When, all over Europe, the emphasis is on decentralisation, devolution and the delegation of powers, this country should meet the challenge and give leadership in the transformation of our society and our economy into smaller, more manageable, self-governing but interdependent units. We must move away from centralisation, bureaucracy and conformity. Regionalism and local self-government will become more important in the Europe of tomorrow than the complex interplay between independent nation states.

Today, when nearly all our major economic and industrial competitors recognise the importance of local self-determination, economic autonomy and the need to provide a flexible localised response to a changing environment, economy and society, we have created a great centralised system that destroys local initiative and disregards local achievement.

Through the introduction of universal education, sanitation and welfare, and through the great cotton entrepreneurs of the north and the great civic fathers such as Joseph Chamberlain in Birmingham, who promoted self-esteem and a measure of local control, this country pioneered great developments in local self-government during the 19th century; but we are now sadly falling way behind other European countries. On the continent, local government is a major force behind economic and social change. Its relationship with the centre is that of a partnership and its role is that of an activator and enabler.

Local government in this country is less powerful than it was 18 years ago. It has less discretion and less money, and it is hampered by a legislative straitjacket designed to prevent it from responding to local needs in contravention of policies determined at the centre. Despite all that, local government is resilient and has responded to changes in our economy and society. It has attempted to match limited resources to changing needs and has, within the confines of its powers, attempted to promote a measure of local autonomy.

I argue that, whatever we might think of local government, it has been able to adapt to a new environment and can provide the key to our future success as a country, if it is allowed to act in partnership with our communities, with local business and industries, and with the voluntary sector, to intervene positively on behalf of the areas that it represents.

I am sure that we shall see parallels with moves in the private sector to greater integration and decentralisation of production groups with their own cost centres. There is an important difference, however. The private sector normally seeks to increase demand and can then increase supply in order to boost profits. Local government cannot do that. It is essentially a rationing agent, hemmed in by central Government's financial controls, which are far more primitive than any specific service-based legislation.

I am now coming to the end of this presentation. We must move with the times. We have become, as one commentator has suggested,

> "Europe's constitutional pygmy, a truncated democracy in which the entire political and economic life of the nation revolves around an all sovereign House of Commons."

That notion of democracy in a complex society is outdated and increasingly threatens not only our liberties but our pockets. The Government's policy of devolution of power and decision making—this is where I differ from the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick)—will surely go some way to bridge the obvious gap that exists between central and local government. That, I maintain, will maximise the benefits of the Government's policies and future Budgets.

10.51 am

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Dobbin) on what he referred to as his "presentation"; it certainly was. He presented his constituency most ably. He will be able to contribute his obvious knowledge, and I should think experience, of local government to future debates, and I am certain that he will be listened to with interest and respect.

I shall now leave the Rochdale area, to ask the Leader of the House one or two questions. Why did she not feel it necessary to make a statement to the House yesterday, when the first report of the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons was published? Many matters have come before the House since the new Government came into office, but this one affects every hon. Member considerably. I make this speech to draw attention to some aspects of the report in debate before the House rises, and to make more people aware of them.

I have some good news and some bad news; I start with the good. I am delighted that the Committee, under the chairmanship of the Leader of the House, was able to present a unanimous report. I am pleased because it confirms several of the reports, awaiting action, produced by the Procedure Committee under my chairmanship. In addition, some new thoughts have been brought into consideration. Most important, however, all members of the Committee agreed that the object of the report was to improve the standard and the thoroughness of legislation that is passed by Parliament.

Some of the new considerations are interesting. First, the Government are willing to publish draft Bills, and the report recommends that there should be some pre-legislative scrutiny of those Bills before they are introduced to the House. Secondly, there might be a First Reading committee to consider that legislation before its Second Reading in the House.

Thirdly—repeating a recommendation by the Procedure Committee—there should be greater use of the Select Committee procedure for Standing Committees, which should be able to investigate aspects of a Bill and cross-question witnesses about it before proceeding with the usual Standing Committee amendment and consideration of the Bill. Those are all efforts to ensure that legislation passed by the House is better understood, and less open to error than it may have been in the past.

The next matter of considerable importance is that, at last, we have a sensible recommendation on the programming of legislation. I have argued for many moons that Oppositions of all parties are mistaken in their belief that long debate in Standing Committee, forcing the guillotine to be introduced, does anything to limit the progress of a Government's legislative programme. At no time since the war has a Bill introduced in the Gracious Speech not been approved legislatively during a full Session of that Parliament, unless a general election has shortened the Session.

Most people have not understood that, when a Bill goes into Committee upstairs, the Leader of the House and the officers supporting the Leader of the House have set a date when it must leave Committee, so that its passage may be completed to a reasonable timetable. When the Opposition have spent days—sometimes up to 100 hours—debating the first few clauses of a Bill, the Government have had to introduce a guillotine to ensure that the Bill was before the House for Report by the date that they had in mind.

If that is the case, in order to avoid wasting time in Committee, why not let Members know the period that the Bill can remain in Committee? That would allow the Committee to decide how best to use its time, so that it might debate every major clause. The Procedure Committee has advanced that argument for many moons, and I am delighted that the Government and the Modernisation Committee have adopted that concept.

I hope that, starting in November—I shall discuss the date later—we shall conduct an experiment. Immediately after Second Reading, the Government will produce—we hope by agreement through the usual channels—an idea of the date when the Bill will leave the Committee. It will then be left to the Sub-Committee of the Standing Committee to decide how the hours shall be devoted so that all clauses may be properly debated.

[Sir Peter Emery]

That must have considerable advantages in producing legislation that is better understood and has been thoroughly examined. It will ensure that legislation does not go to the House of Lords that has been only partially considered in Committee or on the Floor of the House.

We seldom pay tribute in the House to the Clerks who serve on Committees. The Principal Clerk at the Table may be embarrassed if I mention him by name, but a paper that he produced was helpful to the House, and Mr. David Natzler, the Second Clerk, has done immense work in producing papers for us. They deserve particular credit.

May I be controversial? I am sorry that the Committee did not start by dealing with Prime Minister's Questions. There is a major arrogance in how the Government altered Prime Minister's Questions without consultation—they are now held only once instead of twice a week. The House has already heard me on this matter, but I shall continue to press it. It is wrong that matters that arise after Cabinet on a Thursday cannot be put to the Prime Minister until the following Wednesday. The Prime Minister talks about wanting to be democratic and pays tribute to the work of the House, but he arrogantly casts the House to one side. We must return to the matter before long.

I have another little hobby horse: I am delighted that we are moving in the direction of modernising the names of Committees so that they describe what Committees do. A Standing Committee does not stand; nor does it last the whole of a Parliament, but only for one Bill. Its sole purpose is to deal with the Bill before it, so I do not understand why it should not be called a legislative Committee. I am glad to say that we shall return to that matter in due course.

I urge the House to pay attention to the report. Will the Leader of the House guarantee today that she will introduce the necessary alterations—there are not many—to Standing Orders so that we can begin this experiment? We should not have to wait until February or March, but should start the experiment in November. The Committee can then monitor it correctly and report to the House on its success in June or July.

I gave the Leader of the House notice of a question that affects the south-west in particular: the improvement of the A30-A303 road links between London and Exeter. Within the "Wessex link", as it is termed, decisions have been made about the run between the north and south of the A36 and A46, which affects the Swindon bypass. I do not wish to argue about those decisions.

However, approval has been given and money earmarked for improvements to the A30-A303 from Marsh to Honiton. The hairpin bends on that road make some aspects of the grande corniche in the south of France look like Woolworth. They are dangerous, and an accident black spot. We need to progress with that, so I hope that the Leader of the House will ensure that the Government do not delay the matter.

Parts of the main link road between London and the west are just single carriageway on both sides. I shall not bother the House by listing them all, but four areas are set for approval, and I hope that the right hon. Lady will press for improvements, which will benefit the tourist industry. Tourism is the biggest industry and the biggest earner in the south-west, so that link road is of the greatest importance. Will she carry that message to the Secretary of State for Transport and the Deputy Prime Minister who heads that Department?

I hope that the Leader of the House accepts that she deserves much credit for how she has chaired the Committee. She has been the one exception in the Government: there has been no arrogance from her, and I hope that some of her colleagues will copy her excellent example.

11.5 am

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): I rise to make my maiden speech and I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to do so before the welcome summer recess. I understand that convention demands that my maiden speech should be non-controversial, which may be difficult; that I describe in glowing terms the delights of my constituency, which I am happy to do; and that I offer generous praise to my predecessor, which I am also happy to do—within reason.

May I take those three themes in reverse order? I am happy to pay tribute to my predecessor, Sir Anthony Durant, who represented my constituency of Reading, West from 1983 to 1 May this year. In total, he served the people of Reading for more than 23 years, having first entered Parliament as the hon. Member for Reading, North, which in those days was considered a genuine marginal seat. Incidentally, the good people of Reading have been thoroughly confused by the machinations of the various boundary commissions, which have over the years tended to favour boundaries that benefited the Conservative interest, despite the long and proud Labour tradition of the town of Reading that stretches back to the days even before our most famous parliamentarian, the late and missed Ian Mikardo.

My first conversation of note with Tony Durant, as he was then, was in the summer of 1986—two years after I was elected to Reading borough council and some two months after I became chair of the leisure committee. It was not so much the conversation that stuck in my mind, although if I remember rightly we were discussing the forthcoming general election—from our respective political bunkers we both agreed that it was good that we would be contesting different seats and not fighting each other—as the venue. It was the backstage beer tent at the Reading festival. That would not have been remarkable had it not been for the decision of the previous Conservative-controlled council to scrap the rock festival in 1984 and 1985.

At that time, I learnt two important lessons from Tony Durant: first, he took absolutely no notice of the absurd and unpopular actions of his Conservative council colleagues, which is presumably why he was re-elected to this place long after they had all been wiped out in the council chamber; secondly, he was a man who liked people. Moreover, he was a man who liked people who like drink. He was and still is a convivial and sociable man, in marked contrast to some of the humourless robots who are, I am afraid, too often a feature of British politics.

However, Sir Anthony was not always a pillar of political consistency. He fought the 1974 election opposing the Reading rock festival—that was before he discovered the backstage beer tent—and in 1992 he spoke out against the planned Tory pit closures only to vote in favour of them in December of the same year.

Sir Anthony Durant and I share a common interest: a love of the rivers and canals of Berkshire and the Thames valley—Sir Anthony, appropriately, from the cabin of his boat; I, also appropriately, from the muddy river bank fishing for fish more often than I ever fish for votes. We have both spoken out against the decline in our region's rivers, Sir Anthony on over-extraction from the beautiful little River Pang, which has almost been destroyed by the greed of the privatised water companies, and I over the decline of the River Kennet and the River Thames through pollution and threats to develop the watermeadows and over the disgraceful dumping of radioactive effluent by AWE Aldermaston.

Sir Anthony was a hard-working and well-respected constituency Member. His announcement that he planned to retire and not contest Reading, West at the last election persuaded me to seek the Labour nomination for the seat. Although a majority of 13,000 might seem daunting, a good proportion of that number represented Sir Anthony's personal vote, which could not be considered the property of the Conservative hopeful, one Nicholas Bennett. That proved to be the case.

My last conversation with Sir Anthony—I trust that there will be many more—was a month or so after the general election. He was in fine form and from the twinkle in his eye it seemed that that former Government Whip and undoubtedly loyal Conservative was not too unhappy about leaving this place or seeing the unpleasant Mr. Bennett soundly defeated.

I hope that there is no parliamentary convention that obliges hon. Members to speak in glowing terms of their political opponents at a general election. The Leader of the House is not scowling at me, so perhaps there is not. Never in my 25 years in politics have I encountered such a bigoted, bumptious and unpopular individual as Nicholas Jerome Bennett, the would-be Conservative Member for Reading, West, former Member for Pembroke and junior Welsh Office Minister in the last Thatcher Government.

I found it remarkable that when I arrived at the House I received a warm welcome from senior members of all political parties, some of whom are sitting on the Opposition Benches today. They welcomed me not because they knew me or had a particular interest in the internal politics of Reading, but because they had been spared the awful prospect of being lectured and hectored by that individual for the next five years.

In case hon. Members are wondering what they are missing, I shall outline a few of the policies that I will not be supporting and which would have been put forward had Labour not won the seat of Reading, West. They include the wholesale privatisation of the national health service, the removal of the right of council tenants to act as jurors—after all, we cannot have poor people judging rich people, can we?—outlawing abortion and thereby forcing rape victims to go through the agony of giving birth to their assailant's child, removing child benefit from families whose children get into trouble at school—that proposal was condemned by the Bishop of Reading—and branding all homosexuals as immoral and evil.

The list goes on. If it has a familiar ring, that is because it is the manifesto of the hard-line, right-wing No Turning Back group. I trust that that political doctrine was well and truly buried on 1 May 1997.

I shall deal now with my constituency and the town of Reading as a whole. It may be a town, but in reality it is a city and deserves city status as the capital of the Thames valley. Four years ago, the council, of which I was a member, led the campaign for Reading to be granted city status. We hope that that wish will soon be realised.

Reading has an impressive history, sometimes a bad press but a great future. The early settlements grew up at the junction of the Holy Brook and the River Kennet. The Domesday book records that we boasted six mills, five fisheries and a nunnery, which I am sure was useful. In 1121, Henry I founded Reading abbey. Later in that century and in the centuries that followed, Reading was a regular venue when Parliament assembled outside London, often because of plagues in London. I offer Reading as a venue should we get round to rebuilding this place and need a temporary venue for our Parliament.

Elizabeth I granted the town its first royal charter. A mayor was appointed—not elected—and was served by burgesses, but, for the life of me, I do not know what they were or what they did. The civil war was disastrous for Reading. The town changed hands several times from king to roundhead, much like today's two-party politics. The 18th century brought an improvement in communications. The canal was completed from Reading to Newbury and the roads were improved and became a great coaching route to Bath.

The 19th century witnessed the growth of industry—beer, biscuits and bulbs—the three Bs for which Reading became known. These great companies were Simonds the beer, Sutton's the bulbs and Huntley and Palmer's the biscuits. Sadly, only beer remains but I can commend a pint of Courage Best to anyone in need of either a hangover or a laxative.

Reading has attracted bad press, despite its wonderful location at the junction of two rivers in the heart of the Thames valley and on the edge of the Chilterns. In his classic book "Three Men in a Boat", Jerome K. Jerome said of the town:

> "We came in sight of Reading about eleven. The river is dirty and dismal here. One does not linger in the neighbourhood of Reading."

Other commentators have described our town as the most boring and average town in Britain and as a dull, dirty and uninteresting place. That is simply not the case, as I am sure Sir Anthony would agree. Our detractors are blinkered or out of date.

Reading is a town with a tremendous future. It is a popular place to live. In a recent survey it was voted the eighth best town in which to work and play. It is in the top 25 per cent. for average household earnings. It has a high degree of economic activity. It is in the heart of silicon valley and generates new jobs in the high tech and communications industries. It has superb sports and leisure facilities and, of course, its famous festivals. It has a lively town centre.

We may have a bad press from time to time, but we have good local newspapers. I am pleased that the *Reading Chronicle* has emphasised its pride in Reading and has recently launched a Pride in Reading campaign which highlights the growing night life in the town and our new football stadium, which Reading football club will move into next year. Our local team was only four minutes away from glory in the premiership until we lost against Bolton, but perhaps we should not dwell on that for too long.

We have prominent local business activity in firms such as Microsoft, Prudential, Yellow Pages, Foster Wheeler and Digital. An ever-growing number of firms are keen to

[Mr. Martin Salter]

invest in Reading. Work has started on our £200 million Oracle shopping development. We have pride in our town and our weekly newspaper reflects that, as does our daily newspaper, the *Reading Evening Post*, which has sponsored many campaigns such as our successful empty homes strategy.

The main argument that I want to advance this morning is the urgent need not just to modernise the arcane workings of the House but radically to overhaul our entire political system. It is a matter of debate whether we need to mark the millennium with a PVC-coated dome, but I am sure that we need to equip our society for the 21st century with a new politics, new political structures and a political system that connects with the public and their aspirations.

We need a political system that is modern, relevant and efficient and which encourages people from all walks of life to put themselves forward for public office. Not to make the change, not to have the courage to pursue the radical constitutional and political agenda, will result in further decline in the reputation of Parliament and of politics and politicians in general. For many of us, the nightmare scenario is an American political system with a 50 per cent. turnout and an increasingly alienated and disfranchised electorate.

It will not be easy for me or my party, with its large majority, to pursue the agenda of political reform with vigour. In my heart, I am a tribalist. I know the songs, the slogans and the war dances of party politics. In my head, however, I know that the two-party system has had its day. It is confrontational, absurd and often irrelevant. No party has a monopoly on truth, progress or good ideas.

I urge the Government to pursue the pluralist agenda further. I for one welcome the involvement of the leader of the Liberal Democrats in the Cabinet process and the more controversial involvement of Mr. David Mellor in our new football task force, but those are just small steps down a very long road.

The vision was set out by the then leader of the Labour party, Mr. John Smith. He said at our party conference in Brighton in 1983:

> "We are proposing nothing less than a new constitution for a new century. I want to lead a Labour government that will introduce the most radical package of constitutional reform ever proposed by any major political party. This I believe will be the battleground of the 1990s as we define the new politics of a new century. Our choice—Labour's choice—is to build a democracy founded on pluralism, participation and justice."

I hope that the new Government will have the courage to turn into reality the dreams and vision of the late John Smith.

There is a powerful case for electoral reform. It will herald a more consensual style of politics, develop the pluralist agenda and reflect more accurately the wishes of the British people at the ballot box. However, I see no sense in having different electoral systems for Scotland, Wales, Europe and Westminster. The acid test for any electoral system is that it is easily understood by the people who use it. I also favour the retention of the constituency link. That is why I will not get involved in esoteric arguments about the rights and wrongs of different systems of proportional representation. Those systems that retain the constituency link—between the Member of Parliament and the people he or she represents—are the systems that we should support.

There is no case at all for the existence of a second Chamber based on the hereditary principle, 75 per cent. of whose Members are there by accident of birth. They had the temerity to inflict 350 defeats on the last Labour Government. During my short time in this place, I have learned that the other place will not inflict 350 defeats on this Labour Government. I believe that there is a case for reforming the second Chamber, but not for its abolition.

I turn now to the reform of the House of Commons. I remind hon. Members—particularly my colleagues on the Government Benches—of the statement in the Labour party policy document "A New Agenda for Democracy", which says:

> "There is no doubt that the role of the House of Commons is central to realising the objective of creating the bedrock of a pluralist democracy in the UK, and that as the millennium approaches we need to prepare a legislature fit for a new century."

I welcome the first report of the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons. We are now to have a much improved Order Paper: it is no longer in code and I hope it is understandable to hon. Members and to the public. I welcome the suggestions regarding fuller involvement in the legislative process and better timetabling of Bills.

However, there is much more work to be done. I hope that we can have advance notice of business. If my whip for 27 October can tell me roughly what I will be doing in three months' time, I hope that, when Parliament is sitting, we can have some idea of what we shall be doing in three weeks' time—if only to allow us to plan our activities as Members of Parliament and our liaison with constituents. I suggest that the conduct of debate should be regulated and that some sort of time limit should be imposed—except on maiden speeches, of course.

I am happy that there are Privy Counsellors, but should they be privileged Members of Parliament? Should they really have the opportunity to prevent other hon. Members from participating in debates in this Chamber from time to time? As for the voting system, I have lost count of the number of discussions that I have had with senior Members who defend the Lobby system, which they say presents an excellent opportunity to meet Ministers. I am sure that Ministers really want to hear from 400-odd members of the parliamentary Labour party at five past 10, 11 or 12 at night. It is not an effective way of putting our constituents' cases to Ministers and it is not a good use of our time. I hope that the Government will consider electronic voting, proxy voting and other measures that will make our parliamentary lives more efficient and make us less of a laughing stock.

If we dispense with the Lobbies and the Lobby system, I hope that we can extend the Chamber so that it is less confrontational and there is a seat for every Member. I hope also that the Government will examine the hours of work. Most hon. Members have better things to do at 10 or 11 o'clock at night than join in the club atmosphere of this House and traipse through the Lobbies.

There is also the question of the role of Back Benchers—particularly in light of the Government's massive majority. It is regrettable that early-day motions are merely political graffiti. When a third of hon. Members sign an early-day motion—particularly if there is cross-party support—is there not a case for allocating parliamentary time to discuss that obviously important issue on the Floor of the House? We could go much further and talk about fixed-term Parliaments. I would certainly support any move to outlaw holding local authority elections on the same day as a general election. That emasculates the work of local councils and does not afford a true reflection the electorate's wishes as to whom they want to represent them in Parliament and whom they want to run their councils.

A strong argument has been made—I am nervous as the Whips are in the Chamber—for preventing Whips from being involved in appointing Members to Select Committees. After all, they are Committees of the House that are supposed to scrutinise the actions of the Executive. That argument was put very well by a Member of Parliament who is now a Whip.

I trust that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will reply fully to my points and will press her colleagues in government to pursue this agenda. On 1 May, the Labour party was elected to change the face of British politics. I hope that we can get on with it.

11.25 am

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): It is a particular pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) and to commend his maiden speech. He was one of the first new Labour Members I talked to on the first day of the new Parliament and we have had many interesting conversations since then. I am quite sure that, as a result of his modest and moderate speech, which caused great excitement on the Government Front Bench—not least on the part of the duty Whip, the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice)—he has an exhilarating political career ahead of him.

The hon. Gentleman touched on many issues concerning Reading, the constitution and our parliamentary system. Perhaps it will not surprise hon. Members to learn that I agree with a number of his comments. The hon. Gentleman has a distinguished local government record. He follows Sir Anthony Durant as Member of Parliament for Reading, West—about whom he made some very nice comments—so he has a considerable act to follow. I think that he is aware of that fact.

The hon. Gentleman is also aware of the constituency connections that seem to be creeping into the debate. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that you represented the Middleton and Prestwich constituency in a previous incarnation—as was alluded to earlier. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery), who is sitting behind me, won the seat of Reading—which then comprised the whole town of Reading—in 1959. He has reminded me of the considerable struggle that lies ahead for the hon. Gentleman, who will obviously fight for the interests of his constituents and of all the people of Reading.

The hon. Gentleman made certain historical allusions in his speech and he will know that Reading was a royal headquarters during the civil war. I gather that the royalty of the day walked off with the Reading civic silver—royalty are not supposed to behave in that manner, but sometimes they do—which, somehow or other, ended up in Windsor castle. It remained at the castle through the Cromwellian period and the Restoration and is still there. The town of Reading has made various requests for the return of the silver, but it remains in royal hands. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will make its recovery a priority so that it may play a major part in the egalitarianism of future constitutional reform.

Mr. Salter: I am slightly worried that the hon. Gentleman is inciting me to commit an act of treason.

Mr. Temple-Morris: I judge from his maiden speech that the hon. Gentleman is well capable of dealing with the issue of treason and any other issue. I am sure that the institution of the House will look after him in that regard.

I value the opportunity to speak in the debate. Many hon. Members want to speak; these occasions are useful as they enable us to raise matters of concern to us, to the House and to our constituents. I want to raise a matter that concerns my constituency: agriculture and the beef industry. Leominster, in the county of Hereford, has 700 sq miles of rural land with two and a half traffic lights. When I became its Member of Parliament 24 years ago it had no traffic lights.

In my last speech on the beef industry and agriculture in May 1996—a little more than a year ago—I made two relevant points that I want to repeat now. The first—then, it was almost a plea—was that the BSE crisis should not result in what I called Euro-bashing. It seemed to me that if we depended on an institution such as the EU to get out of a crisis, there was no point in attacking it, let alone not getting on with it. In that regard, I commend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who took that point straight away and worked hard to improve relations, which is particularly relevant to making progress in this matter.

The second point, which in general terms the House has observed, is that there is no necessity for undue party politics on the BSE issue and getting the ban lifted. Controversial points will occasionally be made on behalf of beef producers about this subsidy or that support, but in general we are all in the same boat. We must do the best for our farmers and the best to get the ban lifted. The way to do that is, first, to get on with Europe and, secondly, to recognise that the United Kingdom exacerbated, by its BSE crisis and the press reaction to it, a deeper problem which goes beyond BSE—the consumption of red meat in general and beef in particular. All of us, including our farmers, must acknowledge that European beef producers and the EU market as a whole are, if anything, in a worse state than ours.

Addressing the main problem, I shall make four fairly succinct points. First, the problem goes beyond BSE: we are dealing with declining consumption of red meat. That goes right across the EU. I am happy to say that Britain is better than most in that regard. For example, we are dealing with the decline of the family meal—the great Sunday lunch that I continue to enjoy. Good British beef will always sit on the Temple-Morris table, but it will not sit on every table. We are dealing here, I shudder to say, with convenience foods as much as with beef. We are dealing with chicken meat, associated flavourings and all the rest that is found on the sad gastronomic path down which all too many people across Europe appear to have been tempted.

Secondly, we have a problem that is familiar to the agriculture industry—overproduction and structural surplus. An appalling problem is building up. EU intervention stocks of beef, including ours, could reach no less than 2 million tonnes by 2001 and 4 million tonnes by 2006.

[Mr. Temple-Morris]

Thirdly, we have the continuation of the general agreement on tariffs and trade reforms and the resulting progressive squeeze on subsidised exports to the third world and other countries.

Fourthly, we have increasing national and EU financial constraints on subsidies to farmers allied to the major question of the reform of the CAP and the overall financial priorities of the EU, not least when it is concerned with enlargement.

I can make my next four points briefly because an Adjournment debate is coming up later in which my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) will raise them and an Agriculture Minister will deal with them—no doubt much to the relief of the Leader of the House who has quite enough on her plate already.

First, I welcome the Europewide scheme we have succeeded in obtaining for the removal of the specified risk materials from beef, which means that we can control imports. They have been coming in at the rate of 160,000 tonnes a year, which will have an effect on market prices, not least for the farmer.

Secondly, domestic consumption is up. We have made a remarkably good recovery and I believe that we are almost up to pre-BSE levels.

Thirdly, I welcome, as I am sure will all hon. Members, the decision by McDonald's and Burger King once again to take British beef. I wish that it had come sooner, but at least it has come now.

Fourthly, I welcome the advances that have been made in getting the traceability scheme up and running. I was encouraged by a recent Government statement that we can expect that as a reality by early 1998—the sooner the better, but we need to make progress on the exemption from the ban of certified herds. That is the vital area. Last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) did a great deal of work on the matter and he knows its importance. We need to obtain a progressive lifting of the ban. To get the ball rolling, I stress that it is vital that we concentrate on the certified herds, but we must also settle the overall direction of policy towards the industry, making it more competitive and less subsidised.

One central point as, inevitably, we go down the competitive and less subsidised path is that we must give farmers time to adapt along the way. Too quick a change could spell disaster for the countryside. There is a future for the British beef industry. The industry accepts that there will be change, but it needs to be given a firm direction and sufficient direction to have confidence in its future.

11.36 am

Mr. Martin Caton (Gower): I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Bedford (Mr. Hall), for Burton (Mrs. Dean) for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Dobbin) and for Reading, West (Mr. Salter). All showed a tremendous commitment to the constituencies that they now represent and a determination to fight for their constituents. I look forward to working in partnership with them in the years ahead.

I was keen to speak today because I want to help to correct the impression beginning to be created—partly, I am afraid, by those on the Labour Benches—that the Labour party in Wales is seriously divided on the Government's plans to create a Welsh Assembly. If all the Labour Members of Parliament from Wales who oppose democratic devolution and all those with serious reservations about specific parts of the policy are combined, they total just six—six out of 34—and only half that number are totally opposed to the creation of a Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, in 1979, only six Labour Members of Parliament were opposed to devolution and the Welsh people voted four to one against devolution?

Mr. Caton: The hon. Gentleman brings me to my next point. The great difference between 1979 and now is the attitude of the Labour movement in Wales. It is fair to say that, in 1979, the movement was split from top to bottom; it was seriously divided. That does not happen now, because the policy that has been spelt out in the White Paper is not the product of civil servants in Gwydyr house or Cathays park; it is the product of the Labour party in Wales. It is itself a product of real devolution.

We, the people of Wales, involved in the Labour party, developed that policy through our policy commission, our conferences and in consultation with the people of Wales. We came to that policy, we put it to the people on 1 May and they voted for it. That is why we do not have the same situation that we had in 1979.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I warmly welcome my hon. Friend's remarks. In 1979, almost a majority of Welsh Members of Parliament were opposed to devolution, because in those days there were Conservative Members in Wales. The position now is that, out of 40 Welsh Members of Parliament, only three will vote against, three are lukewarm and 34 will campaign enthusiastically for the thrilling Welsh Assembly that we are about to create.

Mr. Caton: I thank my hon. Friend for making those valuable points.

I have listened carefully to the arguments against the proposals in "A Voice for Wales" that have been made in the House and outside it. Opponents of a Welsh Assembly fall into three broad camps: the myopic utopians, the "what-if-ers" and the Chicken Licken tendency, although some people are clearly in more than one of those camps.

Myopic utopians apparently believe that we live in the most perfect of all possible constitutions, and that our existing structure of government cannot be improved in any way. They are completely blind to the glaring democratic deficit that now exists in the governance of Wales. They point to the Public Accounts Select Committee, the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, the Welsh Grand Committee and Welsh Question Time and they ask, "Is that not accountability enough for you?" Frankly, the answer is no. As valuable as those democratic vehicles were and are, they have not and could not properly and fully scrutinise the work of the Welsh Office and the public bodies in Wales or provide policy initiatives in all areas of their responsibility.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Gentleman's analysis. I have seen a deterioration in the scrutiny of the Welsh Office during the 20 years that I have been in the House. Does he agree that one of the ways in which the system is breaking down is that, at Welsh Question Time, non-Welsh Members table questions and thereby dictate the agenda? Welsh Members need to ask questions of Welsh Office Ministers on many subjects, but we cannot do so because we are unable to get on the list for questions.

Mr. Caton: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I have been in the House a far shorter time than he, but even in that short time I, as a representative of Wales, have felt that same frustration at not being able to hold our Executive accountable. I certainly agree with his point. Decisions on how £7 billion of spending by the Welsh Office is allocated should be made by directly elected representatives of all the people living in Wales. It is as simple and as straightforward as that.

The "what-if-ers" are another kettle of fish. They fear what the Assembly might do. What if its south Wales members get together and distort allocation of resources? What if its north Wales members get together and get excessive attention given to the Welsh language? What if it ends up full of retired councillors who starve the health service so as to put money into local authorities? What if, what if, what if! I think that the Assembly will behave fairly and rationally, and will be encouraged to do so by the structures and approach outlined in the White Paper.

If we are honest, we have to admit that democracy does not guarantee good government. If we did not know that before, we learned it in the 18 years to 1 May. Democracy does not guarantee good government, but it provides the best chance of good government. If I had to make a choice between leaving decisions about the future of Wales to a Secretary of State who, as we have seen, may have no connection with Wales and an Assembly directly elected by the Welsh people, I know which I would choose, and which is more likely to make the right decisions for the whole of Wales.

The third category of opponents is the Chicken Licken tendency, and that is where the official Opposition seem to position themselves. Hon. Members will remember that an acorn fell on Chicken Licken's head and she told everyone that the sky was falling in. This time the acorn of accountability has fallen on the head of Quibble Ribble, and he is running about, saying, "Not only is the sky coming down, but the country is falling apart. Oh dear, oh dear."

The Opposition claim that the creation of a Welsh Assembly threatens the future of the United Kingdom, and that it is the first step on the road to secession. That analysis of the facts is as distorted as Chicken Licken's explanation of her sore head; it is ludicrous. The White Paper makes it clear that we are talking not about devolving more power to Wales and the Welsh Office from Westminster or Whitehall, but about democratising the considerable powers that have already been transferred.

It is difficult to understand how anyone who believes in democracy can oppose this measure. Everyone seems to accept the need for a different approach to government in Wales. I did not see one manifesto or election address from any party or individual campaigning in Wales that called for the closure of the Welsh Office or even a reduction in its powers. We can only assume that there is common ground on devolution: it is democracy that is in dispute.

To be honest, I understand the logic of the argument for not having a Secretary of State and for bringing public services in Wales under the relevant English Ministries. I would oppose that, but I would understand it because it would be a way of creating a direct, democratic pathway of accountability. What is more difficult to comprehend is the position that recognises the need for devolved Welsh government but denies the demand that it be made directly and democratically accountable to the people of Wales. In my opinion, that denial is more likely to undermine the integrity of the United Kingdom.

Like many of my colleagues, this summer I shall engage with the myopic utopians, the "what-if-ers" and the Chicken Lickens in what I hope will be a friendly debate about the future of Wales, but I hope to spend more time talking to the people in my constituency and in other parts of Wales. They know that the structure of Welsh government has not delivered the goods for them, and I shall urge them to use their vote for change on 18 September, so that it can in the future.

11.46 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to say a few words about a report in *The Sunday Times* that the Labour Government propose to pour tonnes of concrete over the countryside in England, Wales, Scotland and, I assume, Northern Ireland to provide more homes. I shall make only a short contribution, because many hon. Members want to participate in the debate.

I speak on behalf of not only the United Kingdom as a whole, but my constituency of Ribble Valley, 75 per cent. of which is an area of outstanding natural beauty. In maiden speeches this morning, hon. Members have spoken at length about the beauty of their constituencies. I speak with emotion about the beauty of my constituency. It is beautiful and I wish it to remain so. The last thing that I want is a change in Government policy that will result in thousands of homes being built on green-field sites in my constituency.

William Blake's "Jerusalem" talks of those feet in ancient times that walked upon England's pastures green. That may well have been written about the Ribble valley. In 20 years' time, it may have to be rewritten to talk of those feet in modern times that walk upon England's built-up areas and industrial estates. That does not have quite the same ring, does it? I hope that the Leader of the House will refute the plans for extra homes that were mentioned in *The Sunday Times*.

We have heard that 2 million extra homes may be built in the countryside. That would be a complete nightmare. The Council for the Protection of Rural England says that a quarter of a million acres of countryside are flooded by concrete every year. That is a dramatic figure, and it would be appalling if it were to be increased. Imagine how much worse it would be if Labour allowed building on green-field sites throughout the country. I do not dispute the fact that additional housing is required, but I take issue with the plans that were reported in *The Sunday Times* this weekend. Once again, the Labour party has proved that it does not understand the countryside and hates the rural way of life.

The comments of the Minister for London and Construction betrayed the Government's commitment to green politics. The Prime Minister's words about his commitment to the Rio declaration and to the environment can be put to one side if these plans go ahead.

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

There are many small villages in my constituency. The NIMBY factor—"not in my backyard"—is not involved, because small villages, such as Ribchester, have already given way to extra houses. Two hundred houses were built at Barrow, Longridge has had extra homes and quite a number of houses have been built in the small market town of Clitheroe. There are also extra houses in Sawley and Fulwood, which is in the urban part of my constituency, in Preston. As its name suggests, Fulwood was once a wood, but now it is just full. Only about four green plots of land are available, and already the developers want to build on them.

Another problem—which is not unique to the Ribble valley—is caused by the sites of old psychiatric hospitals, although I do not think that anyone has a problem with the idea of building on the "footprints" of those old hospitals. There are three such sites in my constituency, and permission has been given for the building of about 450 houses on one of them. At least 150 houses will be built on the second site, and an application has been made to build several hundred on the third. If the developments go ahead, they will affect nearby villages dramatically, altering their character.

Developers talk about planning gain, saying that, if they are given the opportunity to build all those extra houses, the infrastructure will be improved. Perhaps there will be another school, a better bus service and a chemist. People who move into small villages, however, do so for specific reasons. They enjoy the countryside and the quiet; there seems to be less lawlessness in rural areas than in urban areas. The planning gain lies in the fact that there are not all those extra houses. We should take that into account before developing more land.

There is also the problem of transport. If we build more houses in the countryside, more roads will be needed to meet the demand that will be caused by all the extra cars. People want to live in the countryside because of the quiet, and people want to visit it for the same reason. The last thing that such people want is to see not only 2 million extra houses but millions of extra cars clogging up our countryside.

Tourism is the fastest-growing industry in the world. Last year, more than 24 million tourists came to this country from abroad. Many did not just visit London, but went into the countryside to see our small villages and enjoy the beauty of, for instance, small rural churches. Surely the last thing that we want to do is turn our green fields into one massive building site. People will not wish to come here from abroad to visit one large building site. We are in danger of creating millions of new Swampys who will fight the proposals throughout the country, not just in certain parts of it. What about all the derelict houses in big cities such as Manchester and Liverpool? Thousands of houses are empty, for whatever reason, regardless of whether they are controlled privately or by local authorities. All those houses must be brought into use.

I spent 30 years living above a shop in Swansea. There are still many vacant properties over shops in cities and towns. Let us bring all those properties into use before we start turning our green-field sites into yet more housing estates.

There are two more problems in the countryside. I refer to telecommunications masts, the subject of which has been raised before on the Adjournment, and wind turbines, about which I myself have spoken on the Adjournment. We must give more regard to the countryside. It is not just an asset for us to enjoy; it is an asset which we must preserve for countless generations to enjoy in the future. I hope that the Government will give us some reassurances today.

11.53 am

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The beauty of listening to debates such as this is that we learn things from other hon. Members. Sometimes, we can convey what we have learnt to constituents who come to us with problems. For instance, I have learnt from my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Dobbin) where the lantern is that was snatched from Guy Fawkes. When some primary schoolchildren wrote to me about Guy Fawkes, I had to do some research in order to answer their questions, but I was unable to answer one question: what had happened to the lantern? Now, however, I can respond to the children of Renishaw primary school.

I have learnt many other things during today's debate. I did not know, for example, that my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) had fought Nicholas Bennett at the last general election. That reminded me of a debate that took place here one Friday. Before the Jopling reforms, we used to be able to put in for the chance to lead debates on various motions. One such debate was led by Neil Hamilton, and was entitled "The future of socialism". It was the first occasion on which there had been a solid debate in the House about socialism as a general theory since the days of Philip Snowden. Finally, Nicholas Bennett raised a point of order, because I had been talking for even longer than my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West—partly to prevent Nicholas Bennett from speaking. The debate was largely taken over by Labour Members, particularly members of the socialist Campaign group.

We should have more opportunities to engage in debates of that kind. We should not have to depend on Front Benchers or on Opposition days. Neil Hamilton did the House a valuable service that day.

Hon. Members have raised questions relating to the future of democracy, and I think that it would be useful to have a debate on that. Democratic socialists are interested in that subject: it is part of their socialist vision. Let me develop one or two of the views that have been expressed today. Unfortunately, it is not easy to deal with such big issues in a short speech; we really need a fuller debate.

One massive problem affecting democracy is the European Union. I am not opposed to the European Union itself, but I feel that it should be reformed and developed. It is clearly a bureaucratic, centralising structure, with much of its power and authority derived from "creeping competences". An interesting report on road safety produced by the Select Committee on European Legislation illustrates the division and transfer of power between our Parliament and the European Union. The report shows how power slips from the national parliament to the European Union, and is relevant to many issues besides road safety.

Ultimately, the Council of Ministers—which is still far too secretive—makes decisions over the heads of the national parliaments. Its members do deals among themselves. Our ability to scrutinise the measures that result from those decisions is limited. We should extend the work of the Standing Committees that examine European legislation, and extend the authority of the Select Committee, which does valiant work in difficult circumstances.

It is claimed that the European Union has been opened up and that there is more transparency—that we can see what goes on in meetings of the Council of Ministers, and obtain a few details about voting. That has not been done very effectively, however. The much-vaunted principle of subsidiarity, which holds that legislation should be dealt with at national level wherever possible, has no significant legal import. It is inadequate in terms of explaining who does what and showing national authority. A much more sensible way of achieving that would be a system of clear division and an overall constitution. Such a structure would be federalist, but it does not have to be centralised: arrangements could be drafted to avoid that.

We must grasp the fact that democracy is slipping away from us towards Europe and that many important decisions are made without parliamentary checks and balances. All power should go to parliaments—the European Parliament dealing with European matters and national parliaments dealing with the business that is appropriate to nation states. Many actions need to be taken to advance the powers of parliaments in relation to the Executives. European matters should be decided by the European Parliament, which should not be a mere consultative assembly. There have been nudges towards improving matters, but we are still far short of what is required.

I should like to see a fully fledged, federal, social and democratic Europe. It is only when people have the vote to appoint representatives and, therefore, the power to control and check them that they get the actions that are important to them. That is how the House developed provisions such as the welfare state. The franchise and, therefore, democracy were fully extended, but current arrangements are allowing many such advances to slip away.

Our democracy has many shortcomings and we need to put our own house in order. Some hon. Members spoke about that when discussing Wales and Scotland. Some of our actions have allowed the franchise to slip away. Many people are missing from the electoral register and we need an up-to-date, modern system that will bring about a full franchise—for example, homeless people should be placed on the electoral register.

Parliament must be jealous of the operation of its powers. Labour Members are moving into a new situation and, as it develops, Back Benchers will start to flex their muscles and prod the Executive a bit more. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I have some sympathy with Opposition conclusions, but not with the way in which they put their arguments. When I was in opposition, I observed some hypocrisy in government.

There should be more statements in the House and we should be careful about the operation of guillotines. The procedure should be structured and they should not imposed before there has been proper debate. We should not encourage non-question times, by which I mean underarm bowling to elicit predetermined answers. However, that is not new: it happened under the Conservative Government. Labour Back Benchers should not be too soft on the Government; nor should we be hard on them all the time, looking them in the eye and sticking them with an issue, as we did when we were in opposition. We must be much more sophisticated in pushing our concerns and getting Executive answers. We must remember that we are elected to serve our constituents.

Much more needs to be done in the democratic game. Much has been said about local government having adequate finances. Altering the standard spending assessment formula would confer a massive advantage in that respect. Ian Mikardo was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West who also spoke about world government. A democratic structure within the European Union could be a framework for extension and development. One of the world's problems is the unanswerable power of capitalism in multinational companies whose operations cross many boundaries. We need political frameworks that will counter such powers.

We should think about the great democratic task in which we often fail to get involved. It is as if we have been through the franchise struggles of the 19th and early 20th centuries and think that we have sorted out the basics of democracy and need to attend to only a few changes here and there. We need to work at democracy all the time, or it will slip away unnoticed. Fresh forms of bureaucracy and dictatorship and other sorts of control may seep into political systems unless we keep a continual eye on the game.

12.6 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), in his inimitable way, has taken us from European federalism to world government in about 10 minutes. He made a robust speech in which he dared to mention socialism, for which he deserves the thanks and congratulations of us all. The four hon. Members who deserve special congratulations are those who made their maiden speeches.

This debate, which has been slightly changed by Jopling, originally took place over three hours before each recess to discuss why the House should not adjourn. Hon. Members would give reasons for special debates and say why the House should not adjourn until those debates had taken place. So many topics have been aired this morning in 13 diverse and interesting speeches that the House would sit almost until 27 October if the Leader of the House acceded to all the requests. I shall not endorse such requests and I hope that the right hon. Lady will allow us to go tomorrow after a fairly exhausting time in recent months.

I return to the four maiden speeches. The hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) made a brave plea for the name of his constituency to be changed. No doubt those who deliberate on such matters will note what he said because he made a strong, if not an unanswerable, case. The hon. Gentleman paid a gracious tribute to his predecessor, Sir Trevor Skeet, and we are grateful to him for that because Sir Trevor endeared himself to hon. Members throughout the House. He was first elected to the House in 1959 and therefore had a long parliamentary pedigree. The hon. Member for Bedford also said how concerned

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

he was about the workings of the Child Support Agency. That concern is shared and has been voiced in all parts of the House for a considerable time.

We heard an interesting historical maiden speech, entirely non-controversial, from the hon. Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean), a fellow Staffordshire Member. She talked with understandable pride about the brewing industry and with equally understandable pride about Uttoxeter race course. She also mentioned the marathon speech-making abilities of her predecessor, Sir Ivan Lawrence, who is much missed on the Conservative Benches and who rendered the House a signal service by the way in which he chaired the Select Committee on Home Affairs.

Listening to the maiden speech by the hon. Member for the new constituency of Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Dobbin), I wondered as I heard those rich Scottish tones whether, if and when the Scottish Parliament is established, so many English constituency associations will be willing to make the wise decision that his obviously did and choose a Scottish representative.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the gunpowder plot and the lantern, and we heard about the mutiny on the Bounty too. His speech was a veritable tour de force. He also made proper reference to his predecessor for part of the constituency, "Gentleman Jim" Callaghan—"Little Jim" as he called him. The hon. Gentleman also talked about the important links between local and central government. I shall not follow his slightly more provocative remarks, but most of his speech was certainly in the tradition of non-controversial maiden speeches.

I am not entirely sure that I can say the same about the longest of the maiden speeches that we heard this morning, by the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter). As I listened to him, I could not help but recall the fact that I had the singular distinction of having to congratulate the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on his maiden speech. I remember, way back in 1970, saying that I rather thought that the House might hear from him again. I suspect that the House will also hear quite a lot from the hon. Member for Reading, West, and I am sure that even if we do not agree with it we shall be entertained, and sometimes perhaps provoked, by it.

The hon. Gentleman paid a generous tribute to Sir Anthony Durant, for which we are grateful. He is a most convivial man, as the hon. Gentleman said, and he was always a redoubtable spokesman for his constituency of Reading, for which he had an enormous affection—an affection clearly shared by the hon. Gentleman who now represents that seat.

I was a little concerned by the fact that after only three months here the hon. Gentleman wants to modernise the entire system. I sometimes say to new colleagues that one must not assume that everything that was done before was decided by imbeciles or that things have evolved for no specific reason. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will become absorbed into our ways to some degree and will make a positive contribution to our debates.

We heard several other interesting speeches, including the unusual novelty, in such debates, of a speech from the Front Bench, by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who made what I am sure the Leader of the House will agree was an admirably brief speech about the Government's desire to have an ethical foreign policy. We would all entirely endorse that desire, of course, but my right hon. and learned Friend pointed out some of the contradictions that have been evident in statements emanating from the Foreign Office in recent weeks. I hope that the Foreign Secretary will take an early opportunity to enlighten the House and share with us some of his detailed thoughts on a range of complex issues.

It is wonderful the way in which such debates vary from the great and global to the local. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) very properly took the opportunity to make a plea for his local hospital, the St. Helier hospital in Carshalton. I understand from the hon. Gentleman that the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), was born in that hospital, so that is an added reason why what the hon. Gentleman said should be taken carefully into account by the Secretary of State.

The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) deserted, for once, his campaign directed at the Child Support Agency—a campaign for which we all pay him tribute. Today, he made a powerful speech in favour of an energy policy, which illustrated how important it is that the House should not neglect the coal industry. As one who represents a constituency that has seen its coal mines close, I have some fellow feeling with what the hon. Gentleman said.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) also spoke. Despite the request by the Leader of the House, I shall not touch on the point about submarines but will leave it for her to deal with. My hon. Friend made an important speech, drawing on his considerable knowledge as Chairman of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, which deals with delegated legislation.

My hon. Friend talked in particular about the implications of devolution. If we have a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly, how will secondary legislation be dealt with? What will be the intricate relations with the House of Commons? That is an important subject which deserves careful and detailed consideration and a most careful answer.

My right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) talked about the report of the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons. I echo his genuine tribute to the Leader of the House, who has chaired that Committee with exemplary skill and impartiality. I also echo his wish that all members of the present Government would take a leaf out of the right hon. Lady's book and behave towards the House with a respect that, while never veering into subservience, shows a true respect for its position and its traditions, and that they would not bypass the House when making announcements. The right hon. Lady may be too modest to talk to her colleagues about that, but I hope that her colleagues will take what has been said carefully to heart.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) talked about the beef industry, and made a strong plea, which I second, for the continuation of the Sunday lunch.

The hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) talked about utopia as though we believed that utopia existed now. I remind him that it was a fantasy that existed in the mind of a great man. With the hon. Gentleman's views on devolution, I think that he is conjuring up a fantasy utopia of his own that will not come to pass.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) made an eloquent Welsh plea for the maintenance of the green belt and the green and pleasant land that so many parts of this country still are. I am sure that that struck a responsive chord with most of us.

We have had a wide-ranging and diverse debate, as we usually do on such occasions. The summer Adjournment debates constitute one of the traditions of the House with which no Modernisation Committee should wish to tamper. It is important that, from time to time, Members should have such open sessions, to which they can come and air their views, and indeed their prejudices, and make pleas for local causes and express their concern about national causes.

Such debates are always difficult for any Leader of the House to sum up. Having taken part in them from the Back Benches many times, I am well aware of that. I am finishing my speech at the precise time that I promised to, so I hope that in her response the right hon. Lady will be able to make at least some reference to the Modernisation Committee, as well as to the speeches that have been made.

12.17 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): As usual in a summer Adjournment debate, we have had a wide range of contributions, with many hon. Members wishing to participate. Many have sat here throughout the debate, some of them without having had the opportunity to speak. That proves that there is a need for such debates.

I will try to deal with as many as possible of the points that have been raised, especially those raised by Members who have been in the Chamber throughout. If I miss anything, I will either write to hon. Members or arrange for colleagues to do so.

I shall start by mentioning the maiden speeches that have been made today. They have all been different in terms of style and content, but they have proved to those of us who have been in the House for some time that the quality of the new Members elected at the recent general election is very high.

The confidence of new Members seems to increase with each intake. I well remember my maiden speech, and also my second "maiden" speech, if I may use that term, in 1987. In those days, people did not approach maiden speeches with such confidence, and I congratulate the Members who after such a short time in the House have managed to do that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) clearly has used the last three months well to assess the issues of main concern to his constituents. He highlighted one problem area which all of us would echo—the problems of those facing difficulty with the Child Support Agency. We all agree on that matter, and the Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons—to which the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) referred—has often used the CSA as an example of where Parliament could have done a better job had we approached our work differently. We all need to learn from such problems and examples, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) gave us a treat when describing her constituency. I could see hon. Members' ears prick up when she mentioned that her constituency included four breweries and one race course, and she invited everybody there for the recess. She may have many takers. She caused a great deal of relief by saying that she would not speaking for as long as her predecessor, and I am sure that she will get other opportunities to catch the Speaker's eye because of her brevity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Dobbin) inherited the seat of a close friend of mine, Jim Callaghan, who came to this House on the same day as I did many years ago. My hon. Friend raised important constituency interests, particularly the relationship between local and central Government. We must all be conscious of the tensions in that relationship and encourage people to work together. He also mentioned the need for democratic renewal, a theme which was picked up by several hon. Members. I shall return to that matter at the end of my remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) was, as the hon. Member for South Staffordshire said, more controversial in some of his remarks, although not in terms of his praise for his predecessor, Sir Anthony Durant. My hon. Friend proved that he is as sociable and convivial as his predecessor and that he is willing to talk to Members on both sides of the House. That should stand him in good stead. He may not wish to be told this, but he reminded me of one of the highlights of recent years—the Reading versus Bolton Wanderers match. I was on the other side from my hon. Friend, and I thought that that most extraordinary match ended satisfactorily, although I am afraid that my hon. Friend may not agree.

I can agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West about renewing democracy, and the Modernisation Committee has taken many matters on board. He talked about the conduct of debates in this House, and the Committee agreed that that item would be a part of our inquiries later in the year. We will report in due course.

The hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) raised the issue of vitamin B6, and we have all received letters on that topic. He suggested that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, might not understand the pressures attached to the issue. My hon. Friend has a good reputation for listening to people and for taking all evidence on board, and he will do that when answering the representations made to him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) raised an issue that he has raised on more than one occasion at business questions—energy policy—and referred specifically to German coal subsidies. I hope that he will not mind if I write to him in greater detail on this issue, which causes some concerns. The Government are pursuing with the Commission and the German Government subsidies given to German coal producers. My hon. Friend has a long-term interest in coal which comes from his background and that of his constituency. He shares some of my concerns about opencast mining, which may threaten both our constituencies.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) mentioned an issue that he has raised on one or two occasions in this House—St. Helier hospital.

[Mrs. Ann Taylor]

He has had correspondence with me on that topic, and he asked me to convey his grave concerns to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, and I shall do so. The Government recognise that there are difficulties. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is aware of all the recent developments, but I will make sure that my right hon. Friend updates him in the next week or two.

Other issues were mentioned, including the Welsh Assembly. It is useful to have a debate such as this so that anybody who could not take part in earlier debates—such as Friday's—can come here and speak today. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) raised interesting questions about house building and putting concrete across our countryside, as he put it. We all have concerns about how we balance the need to build more houses and the need to protect the countryside, but he did not have to include political gibes. Basically, the Conservative Government faced exactly the same problems and we are restating the targets adopted by that Government. There are genuine problems and I should have thought that a genuine discussion across the Floor would be better than scoring political points.

I apologise to anyone whose points I have not mentioned, but I wish to use my final few minutes to refer to our democracy and, in particular, to our parliamentary procedures. This issue was raised by Members on both sides, and my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) put it in a wider context. Other colleagues, including my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West, mentioned it as well.

The hon. Member for Bosworth, who has a particular interest in statutory instruments, the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery), who has great experience as a member of the Modernisation Committee and of the Procedure Committee, and the hon. Member for South Staffordshire will all be aware that we published the first reports of the Modernisation Committee yesterday. That is a useful step forward, but we would not want our recommendations to be the be-all and end-all of parliamentary reform or modernisation. Modernisation of the House is a process, not an event. It is continuing, and we have made constructive suggestions, some of which the right hon. Member for East Devon outlined.

The Committee has made practical suggestions—such as changing the Order Paper—which prove our sound intentions to tackle some of the problems that have been around for a long time but which may not have been taken on board. There is a genuine mood in the House of Commons that we need a change in the way in which we operate. It is important that we keep the best of our traditions in terms of genuine debate, the established principle of holding the Government to account and making sure that legislation is properly scrutinised, but there is great scope for improving the way in which we operate. Our objective as a Committee has been to try to make suggestions to improve legislation and to make better use of the time of hon. Members. In other words, we want to make Parliament more effective but also more efficient. Our proposals are a part of the way to do so.

I understand that the hon. Member for South Staffordshire has had to be discharged from the Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons so that he can serve on another Committee. I must take this opportunity to thank him for the work that he did on the Committee. It may come as a surprise—to outsiders at least—to know that the work of that Committee was constructive and positive on both sides. There was not a straightforward party divide, which is the normal impression people have of everything that goes on in the House. If people of different political parties agree, they should say so. Just as we say so when we disagree. If we could get over that basic principle, we would make progress and move forward.

This has been an important debate. The right hon. Member for East Devon asked about the Modernisation Committee report and I can assure him that we will have an early debate on it—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. We now come to the next debate.

Sprinkler Systems (Superstores)

12.30 pm

Ms Tess Kingham (Gloucester): I am grateful to have the opportunity to make my maiden speech on a subject on which I feel strongly and which has directly affected people in my constituency—the fire safety of supermarkets and superstores and whether it should be compulsory for them to install fire sprinkler systems.

I am privileged to represent Gloucester—a fine city which has undergone many changes in its history. Just this year, we are celebrating the 900th anniversary of Glevum, the Roman colonia set up where present-day Gloucester now stands. Every year, we host thousands of visitors who come to admire Gloucester's heritage—our wonderful Norman cathedral, the refurbished Victorian docks and the best-preserved friary in England, the Blackfriars friary, to name just a few of our attractions.

Gloucester is not merely a tourist attraction; it is a thriving working city. It was traditionally known for railway carriage and aircraft manufacturing but today, because of our strategic location and good communications and, of course, our wonderful people, we are managing to attract businesses from all over the world to relocate to our fine city. In recent years, we have benefited in particular from the relocation of financial institutions and a good deal of light industry.

Gloucester is also similar to any other major town and city in Britain today in that we have a plethora of new superstores blooming along our trunk roads. They are welcome because they contribute to the local economy and provide jobs, but the fire safety of those superstores and supermarkets concerns me, and that is the reason for today's debate.

In May last year, a major fire broke out at the MFI superstore on Eastern avenue in Gloucester. The building was not fitted with a fire sprinkler system. The fire soon got out of control and engulfed the building. It took 100 firefighters and 15 pumps working throughout the night to control that blaze. Luckily, no one was injured, but the cost was high. More than £5 million worth of damage was done to the building and stock and there was major pollution of the environment in the neighbouring area, damage to neighbouring superstores and a considerable cost to the public purse for the rescue operation.

At that time, I was the prospective parliamentary candidate in Gloucester. I was shocked to discover that it is not compulsory for supermarkets and superstores to install sprinkler systems when they are built. Along with other members of the public, I had assumed that such action would be a matter of course. Under current legislation—British standard 5588, part 2, 1985—fire sprinkler systems are merely recommended.

Since being elected, I have looked into the issue in some detail and I am firmly of the belief that it should be compulsory for sprinkler systems to be installed in all new, warehouse-style, single-storey buildings over 2,000 sq m used for commercial purposes. That definition would encompass the majority of new superstores and if that proposal were implemented, it could help to avert future disasters and potential loss of life.

The arguments for making sprinkler systems compulsory are compelling. First, all evidence shows that sprinkler systems work. Statistics from Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America and the United Kingdom show that sprinkler systems, if they are properly maintained and operational, will control between 95 and 99 per cent. of all fires in the early stages. That is because they are area specific. That means that sprinklers are activated only in the immediate area of the fire, thus attacking the seat of the fire before it has a chance to take hold. If sprinklers are not in use and a fire takes hold, it spreads in area and intensity in between 10 and 20 minutes and becomes what is termed a fully developed fire. At that point, the fire is much more difficult to control and usually requires a full-scale rescue operation of the type that we witnessed at MFI in Gloucester.

Fully developed fires are dangerous and devastating. The lives of firefighters who may have to enter and search unsafe buildings for unaccounted people are put at considerable risk. The main causes of injury and death to firefighters in Britain are flashovers and roof collapses. Those occur in fully developed fires at very high temperatures—the very conditions that fire sprinkler systems are there to inhibit in the first place.

In February 1996, a 21-year-old firefighter, Fleur Lombard, was tragically killed by a flashover when she was fighting a supermarket blaze in Bristol. Fleur's father has been a leading campaigner, calling for compulsory sprinkler systems in superstores. In 1993, two firefighters died when a roof collapsed and, in Dover in 1995, four firefighters were injured in a flashover in a major fire at a B and Q superstore. None of the buildings involved in those incidents had operational sprinkler systems. If they had, the fires could perhaps have been controlled at the early stages and might not have become fully developed fires and reached such an intensity as to become a danger to firefighters' lives.

Fully developed fires also cause environmental damage. Pollutants from burning buildings and materials can be carried by water from firefighters' hoses or expelled directly into the air. Waterborne pollutants from superstore blazes can include such unsavoury things as bleach, fertilisers, paints and dyes and those can accumulate in the soil or find their way into local water supplies. Air pollutants can include carbon monoxide, soot or hydrochloric acid in gaseous form when PVC is burnt.

A final consideration is the financial cost of not installing sprinklers, both to retailers and the public purse. Millions of pounds of retail stock are ruined every year when blazes get out of control and firefighters have no option but to deluge the whole area in tens of thousands of gallons of water. Sprinkler systems can limit that stock damage. They activate only in the immediate area of a fire, which means that, in comparison with the deluge from firefighters' hoses, little water is expelled in the vicinity of the fire and much less stock damage caused. Fire Protection Association statistics claim that five or fewer sprinkler heads extinguish 95 per cent. of all fires. Sprinkler systems are, therefore, cost-effective for retailers and also prevent the high public costs of full-scale rescue operations and all the accompanying paraphernalia that has to go with them.

There is widespread support for compulsory sprinkler systems in the type of buildings that I mentioned. The Loss Prevention Council, the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association and the Fire Brigades Union all support the proposal, as do the general public.

[Ms Tess Kingham]

After the MFI fire in Gloucester, the *Gloucester Citizen*, our well-read daily newspaper, ran a lengthy campaign calling for the compulsory installation of sprinkler systems in superstores and supermarkets. The Gloucester people were asked to fill in a coupon and send it back to the newspaper and to their Member of Parliament. They responded enthusiastically, as I did when the matter was brought to my attention.

The campaign also received support from Douglas French, my predecessor, to whom I pay tribute. He faithfully served the city of Gloucester for 10 years and was well known for his willingness to speak out on any issue if he found it to be morally or politically incorrect, or where justice had not been done. He earned great respect in Gloucester. I did not always agree with him, but I admired his integrity and willingness to stand up and be counted.

At present, it is left to individual retailers to decide whether to be responsible and fit sprinkler systems. Some do it as a matter of course, and they should be congratulated; some learn by their mistakes: the new MFI building in Gloucester has sprinklers; but others refuse to fit them, no matter how much people urge and plead with them.

The new Sainsbury Homebase store, only a few hundred yards from MFI in Gloucester, has consistently refused to fit sprinkler systems. I received a letter from Sainsbury only today saying that it believed that its evacuation procedures and smoke alarms were sufficient. They may be sufficient for evacuating the mobile public, but they are certainly not sufficient to protect the lives of firefighters and save the public purse the considerable cost of rescue operations. Those are compelling arguments.

I hope that the Government will take decisive action and leave the superstores no hole to wriggle through in fire safety. The time has come for superstores to put people before profits: fire systems should be compulsory and installed as a matter of course.

12.40 pm

The Minister for London and Construction (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mrs. Kingham) on an excellent maiden speech. She has done all that hon. Members would expect from a maiden speaker: she paid a generous tribute to her predecessor, described the city that she represents in imaginative and attractive terms and, above all, highlighted a serious issue that deserves earnest consideration in the House and has a direct relevance to her constituency because of the fire to which she alluded, which was a traumatic episode in the life of the people of Gloucester.

The Government share my hon. Friend's concern about fires such as the one in Gloucester and the others to which she referred. It is obviously of particular concern when such incidents cause death or injury to firefighters. I shall say more about the Gloucester fire later, but, at this stage, I should like to express my sympathy, on behalf of the Government, to the relatives of all those firefighters who died in the fires to which my hon. Friend referred. We consider that to be a very serious issue, and it is extremely important that the Government should learn lessons from fires when they occur.

To that end, my Department has a contract with the fire research station, which is part of the Building Research Establishment, to investigate fires in buildings that could have implications for the building regulations. All the three fires to which my hon. Friend referred have been investigated and the issues discussed; for example, the use of sandwich panels is being considered.

The contract with the fire research station enables my Department to consider amendments to the building regulations that could have a bearing on life safety. I must stress at this point that building regulations are made primarily to ensure the health and safety of people in and around buildings, and are therefore not the right tool to deal with wider issues of environmental pollution and property protection. The health and safety of individuals is paramount, and I am sure that my hon. Friend would recognise that that is the right priority.

Guidance that would satisfy the fire aspects of the building regulations is given in approved document B on fire safety. The aim of the guidance is to ensure that buildings are safe while giving designers as much flexibility as possible. In the case of multi-storey retail buildings, the guidance suggests that floor area should be limited to 2,000 sq m in an unsprinklered building or 4,000 sq m in a building fitted with a sprinkler system.

It should therefore be clear that, in new multi-storey retail buildings, the floor area is not normally expected to exceed 4,000 sq m. Previous guidance to earlier building regulations suggested that the size limitation should be related to the volume of the space or compartment, but the current guidance takes account of research that suggested that fire loading was related more to floor area than to cubic measurements. In addition, adequate provision must be made for means of escape in the event of fire, regardless of whether the building is sprinklered.

The current guidance in the approved document suggests that single-storey retail buildings can be of unlimited extent without any sprinklers. A number of fires, such as the one in Gloucester, have occurred in single-storey retail units, and that aspect of the guidance has therefore been reviewed with the assistance of the fire research station, the fire advisory panel and the Building Regulations Advisory Committee.

The results of that work suggested that a case could be made for the installation of a sprinkler system in new single-storey retail buildings where the compartment exceeds 4,000 sq m. That is therefore one of the issues being considered as approved document B is redrafted for consultation. I have recently been in touch with the Home Office on the matter and I am keen that we make progress.

The delay in implementing changes has been caused partly by the lack of urgency accorded to the matter by the previous Administration and partly by the need to get together a comprehensive new package of guidance on fire safety. I am confident that we shall be able to start consultation in the very near future.

Proposed changes will reflect the need to consider the safety of both the occupants of the building and firefighters. Any change to the guidance is still expected to provide the designer with flexibility, giving the option either to compartmentalise the building to provide a physical barrier for fire containment, or to provide a sprinkler installation to control the spread of fire.

I understand that the Gloucester fire was caused by an arson attack during the night of 23 May and the early hours of 24 May last year. Fire was detected in pallets stored immediately outside and adjacent to a large single-storey retail store. The store where the fire started has a floor area of almost 2,000 sq m and is part of a larger development that contains other retail units separated from each other by compartment walls. Fire brigade access to the site is described as good, with access on three sides of the store.

Under the building regulations, the external walls need not be provided with any fire resistance, because they are not classed as elements of structure; they do not support upper floors, as would likely have been the case had the building been multi-storey. The building was also sited far enough away from other buildings and the site boundary for the external walls not to have required fire resistance. Once the pallets had been ignited, the fire had ample opportunity to enter the building through the external walls.

Fire broke into the storage compartment of the building and spread among flat-pack furniture laid out on steel storage racking. There was no form of smoke venting or mechanism for heat release, and firefighters could enter the building only in the very early stages of the fire. The fire spread throughout the retail unit and affected a second smaller unit containing stored carpet rolls, because the compartment wall separating the units failed.

During the fire's development, and mainly owing to the new source of fuel in the carpet area, a thick blanket of black acrid smoke hung over the area. The fumes were thought to be a cocktail of noxious gases. The chief fire officer, environmental health officer and police considered at one stage evacuating the housing development immediately adjoining the site, but it was decided that occupants could remain if they closed all their windows.

The fire officer drew particular attention to the roof structure, which to some extent prevented firefighters from fighting the fire and effectively cooling down the compartment wall separating the units. That was particularly important if an attempt was to be made to prevent the fire from spreading between units.

Because of the temperature of the fire and the nature of the stored materials in the two units, there was clearly a possibility of environmental pollution, although, as I have explained, that is not dealt with under the building regulations. As regrettable as the incident was, I am relieved, as my hon. Friend was, that there was no loss of life or injuries. I have also noted that the units were unsprinklered.

Automatic sprinkler systems have amply demonstrated their effectiveness in preventing large fires and my Department, in conjunction with other Departments, is considering what steps can be taken to encourage more widespread use of sprinklers on a voluntary basis.

Modern sprinkler systems are engineered to the extent that the components are designed to cater for the needs of the insurance industry and can be costly to install. Many systems that protect buildings are hydraulically capable of supplying up to 18 sprinkler heads at any one time, whereas records show that, in most fires, no more than four sprinkler heads actually operate. My hon. Friend referred to an average of approximately five in any individual case. However, it is probable that even a small number of operating heads will be sufficient immediately to reduce the rate of spread of the fire and raise the alarm about the fire.

I understand the concerns of insurance companies and the issues relating to property protection although, as I said earlier, building regulations which deal with fire relate only to those issues that affect life safety. However, the probability of a fire occurring at a time when the mains water supply has failed or when the mains electricity supply is not available is considered to be very small. We are, therefore, looking at ways in which the use of simpler, less costly sprinkler systems for life safety can be encouraged. A research project with the fire research station on sprinklers for life safety and means of escape is being undertaken for my Department to assist with that objective.

Research into a study of the interactions of sprinkler sprays with venting, and their combined effect on the fire gases in enclosures is also being undertaken by the fire research station on behalf of my Department. Another research project is intended to look at the relationship between sprinklers for life safety and means of escape. That will look at whether cheaper and simpler sprinkler systems are adequate for life safety rather than the more costly sprinklers installed for property protection. A study group will be set up to derive trade-off factors which compare the benefits of sprinklers with other fire protection measures such as travel distances and structural fire precautions.

It is also intended to develop mathematical models to assist with the decision making on the use of compensatory features relating to fire precautions in buildings. That will benefit both the occupants of the buildings from a safety point of view and designers with regard to flexibility. It should also help to make buildings cost-effective. Following from that research, there will also be an experimental study to provide better understanding of the interactions of the sprinkler sprays with venting and their effect on fire gases.

Human behaviour in fire is also an important issue, and a study on the impact of sprinkler systems on tenability limits will therefore look at the factors affecting smoke production and the effects of fire gases on human behaviour.

In the meantime, one further issue to which the new Government have given attention is the scope for local authorities to require enhanced fire precaution standards in advance of what would be necessary to comply with building regulations requirements. I was concerned to discover that when appeals were lodged against the exercise of such local discretion, it was routine practice under the previous Government to allow the appeal, therefore nullifying the effect of local discretion. I have stopped that practice and am now looking at all appeals on a case-by-case basis. That will, I believe, be welcome to local authorities which have, as my hon. Friend has highlighted, been frustrated by the inability to secure, in the past, compliance with their enhanced fire precaution requirements other than on the basis of voluntary agreement.

My hon. Friend will, I hope, appreciate from all of this that we fully recognise the importance of fire safety in buildings. Our research programme is designed to assist in the preparation of revised building regulations. I hope that we shall be able to go out to consultation in the next month or so on a revised version of approved document B. I can assure my hon. Friend that the revised text will deal with the issue of sprinklers in large single-storey retail buildings. Nevertheless, I and my officials will look again at the material that she has presented today. We are determined that effective measures must be in place to provide proper protection in the event of fire for all who could be affected, whether they are the individuals who use the store or firefighters trying to contain a fire.

Beef Industry

12.53 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I should like to preface my remarks by declaring a lifelong interest in the meat and livestock industry. I have no intention of saying anything in this debate that would justify scoring political points. For far too long, the food industry in general and the meat and livestock industry in particular has been used for political point-scoring. The House would do well to remember the devastating effect that that has had on the lives and livelihoods of the hundreds of thousands of men and women employed in those industries.

As an earnest of my good intent, I shall start by giving credit where credit is due. I applaud the Government's efforts to achieve a ban on specified risk material in all European Union abattoirs. That is necessary if the European beef industry is to be an integral part of the single market established on 1 January 1996. Common sense decrees that, given that SRM is perceived to harbour the bovine spongiform encephalopathy agent, it is right to ban SRM in all European abattoirs. That is a small but none the less welcome development. As that faint glimmer of light appears at the end of a long and dark tunnel, we should ask ourselves what lessons there are to be learnt for the future.

Never again must the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or the Department of Health precipitate the sort of food scares seen in 1988 about salmonella in eggs and, more recently, in 1996 about BSE. Nor must Ministers of the Crown allow themselves to be stampeded into making pronouncements and taking actions that are not only unsupported by the facts but at odds with practical experience and common sense.

The House will recognise both the events to which I have referred as having occurred under a Conservative Government, but my message to Ministers is that they could just as easily occur under a Labour Administration, given that the sources of the advice that they receive are unchanged and that the civil servants who give the advice are, by and large, the same people who advised the previous Government.

Ministers should be asking not what additional legislation is necessary but what is the source of their advice, what is the quality of the advice that they receive, and what was the end result of following that advice. They should ask those questions against the background of the holocaust in the animal kingdom that has occurred as a result of following advice. Some 3.7 million head of poultry were compulsorily destroyed between March 1989 and June 1996. More than 1.5 million cattle have been needlessly destroyed in the past 15 months. I say needlessly, because there was no realistic prospect that salmonella could be eradicated and there is no proof or evidence that BSE causes Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. We must learn from those experiences. We must learn to understand the dynamics of the rather new phenomenon, the scare. We must recognise the risk of falling into the trap of feeling that something must be done when, more often than not, that action simply serves to confirm people's worst fears. In short, the hazard is that control measures may simply exacerbate the problems and have the opposite effect to what was intended.

Before I turn my attention to the future, I wish to highlight some of the industry's current concerns. The first is the phasing out of the rendering subsidy, which will make beef dearer—the opposite of what is needed in present circumstances. British beef will become even less competitive with foreign imports at a time when the strong pound is creating problems enough. In that regard, the whole farming industry looks to the Government to reconsider their decision on agrimonetary aids. The phasing out of aid to renderers will also drive producers and processors out of business, to the long-term detriment of the nation's balance of payments and the livestock industry's future prosperity. It will precipitate the demise of the knackermen—those unloved and, to the European Union, unwanted people who, along with hunt kennels, provide the livestock farmer with an outlet for fallen and casualty stock, which would otherwise be buried on farm, with all the hazards that that implies.

Secondly, farmers are concerned about the reduction in payments under the over-30-months scheme, not least the arbitrary decision to impose a 560 kg ceiling. It appears that that decision has been made for political reasons, given that there has been no consultation with the industry and that there is no statistical evidence to support that cut-off point.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): On the subject of the OTMS, I should like to draw my hon. Friend's attention to a letter that a constituent of mine, Mr. John Wadland, received from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), in reply to his letter to MAFF in which he set out his concerns as a beef farmer about the reduction in the compensation payment. In that reply, dated 22 July, the junior Minister said:

> "With the greatest of respect I felt yours was a very silly letter. If you really feel that Dr. Cunningham"—

the Minister—

> "who has represented beef and dairy farmers for decades in his rural constituency of Cumbria"—

his constituency is not Cumbria—

> "does not understand the difference in a suckler herd and a dairy herd then you really need your head examining."

What hope do my farmers and my hon. Friend's farmers have when arrogant Ministers write such offensive, rude letters to farmers in trouble?

Mr. Gill: That is not the sort of letter that I would have written. I recall speaking in a debate in the previous Parliament on the subject of quality beef, when I was ruled out of order by the Chair for referring to suckler cows. We should take that lack of understanding of our industry seriously, because we have a lot of leeway to make up so that the public and, indeed, colleagues in the House of Commons understand what our industry entails.

On the subject of the OTMS, I am sure that my constituents would wish me to place on record the anger and frustration felt among Shropshire farmers. Incidentally, their cattle account for 5 per cent. of the nation's dairy herds and 4 per cent. of the nation's suckler herds. They are angry because there are no longer any abattoirs in the county contracted to handle OTMS stock.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Will my hon. Friend comment on the fact that beef cattle in constituencies such as mine, which are effectively store cattle and are raised in open forest in the most ecological conditions, are particularly penalised by the changes to the OTMS, when they are the least responsible for the BSE crisis?

Mr. Gill: I understand my hon. Friend's question. There is a good case for Ministers to look again at the OTMS, to see whether it could be converted into an over-36-months scheme. That would give a little more headroom for the type of cattle production that my hon. Friend described. Given that the limit of 30 months was set arbitrarily, I believe that there is no obstruction to raising it to 36 months. I hope very much that the Minister will consider that.

As I said, in Shropshire there are no longer any abattoirs contracted to deal with OTMS cattle. Will the Minister reconsider his decision not to award a contract to F. M. Caine and Sons Ltd. of Ludlow, which may prove to be the last straw for that knacker business? That would result in serious repercussions on an area that is highly dependent on livestock.

Thirdly, I wish to relay the concerns felt by many of my farming constituents that the calf processing aid scheme is now working against the economics of the beef industry by putting a false bottom in the market, which militates against cost cutting and low inputs as a means of producing a competitive product.

As for the future, let me say at the outset that there is a future for an industry that produces one of the finest and most natural food products in the world. That product contains high-quality protein, important vitamins and vital minerals, which, as any nutritionist worth his salt would tell us, are essential ingredients in a healthy, balanced diet.

As the House knows, the first priority is to get the beef export ban lifted. In that connection, I seek the Minister's confirmation that Her Majesty's Government will, forthwith, as a matter of urgency, put a firm proposal to Brussels that beef from cattle born after 1 August 1996 should be exempt from current restrictions.

The second priority must surely be to restructure drastically the beef regime, so that the industry takes the all-important decisions about what should be produced, in what quantities and to what standards of quality. Those decisions should seen to be quite separate from the ones that Governments may or may not wish to take in relation to the future well-being of the countryside.

The ruination of the beef industry, BSE and other scares apart, has been the dead hand of the common agricultural policy, which has skewed production to the continental pattern of beef production. In other words, no subsidies are paid in this country on beef from heifers, which was always an important source of quality beef on the British market. Even now, the Agenda 2000 proposals seek to take that a stage further, by creating even bigger incentives to produce bull beef as opposed to the traditional steer beef. In the past, so much of our quality beef has come from steer cattle.

The common agricultural policy has dictated quality standards by dint of the specifications for intervention, which in its turn has become, on occasion, a bigger and better customer than consumers. It has created the situation in which billions of taxpayers' money has been spent incentivising the production of a product that the market either does not want or cannot cope with, at a price that consumers are reluctant to pay, as evidenced by the relatively static level of demand.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. As for the future, does he agree that it would be helpful towards meeting the pre-Florence conditions if, rather than moving to a part paper-based traceability system, which could only be bureaucratic and place a heavy burden on farmers, we moved to a computer-based system, and that we did so quickly?

Mr. Gill: My right hon. Friend has raised a matter which is of concern to many of my farmers. The sooner we decide on the system that we intend to adopt to tag and identify animals, and move to it, the better. I am mindful of the fact, however, that there are extreme practical difficulties in ear-tagging animals. Although it is easy to do that in practice, in the weeks during which the cattle are grazing, tags are inevitably lost. There is then a huge problem in trying to trace which tag has been lost and its number, and replacing it. As an industry, we must consider other forms of identifying cattle, and certainly my right hon. Friend's suggestion is entirely sensible. I believe it to be the most practical, and I am sure that the Minister will note his suggestion.

The CAP beef regime has had most unfortunate consequences for British beef. When I spoke on "Farming Today", I was at pains to try—when the interviewer would allow me to get a word in edgeways—to explain that in the case of my family business, which runs an abattoir, we gave up the slaughter of cattle about 10 years ago. We did so not because of BSE, but simply because that commodity had become so political that I concluded that I was not clever enough to best-guess the decisions of the Intervention Board and all those people in Brussels who interfere so dramatically in the business.

We need to get away from all that and put the whole industry back in a position in which it can call the shots and decide on the quality and standards that will give the consumer a first-class product. I have no doubt that this country can produce better-quality beef than can any other country in Europe or, indeed, the world.

The system that I have just described provides a sharp contrast with how we did things 25 years ago, before we joined the Common Market. The old British deficiency payment scheme meant that farmers' incomes were maintained, consumers had the benefit of cheaper meat and ate more of it, taxpayers subsidised food production, to the benefit of non-taxpayers and people on low incomes, and food was used for its intended purpose: feeding hungry mouths, not creating wine lakes or beef and butter mountains, which ultimately have to be disposed of at further prodigious cost to the taxpayer.

The Minister may not agree with my analysis, but no one can deny that, for as long as most of us have been in the House, there have been calls for the reform of the common agricultural policy. I have one question for all who say that reform is the answer: how do they intend to bring about such reform of the CAP? It would require either unanimity or perhaps even a qualified majority vote, whereas it is as plain as a pikestaff that there are more winners than losers under the policy. I do not expect that many Germans would share my perspective; but my

[Mr. Gill]

perspective is that of a practical man representing the interests of an intensely practical beef industry, which was once the finest in the world.

What reform of the CAP there has been has always resulted in bigger problems, more expense and more bureaucracy. I would ask the Minister not to underestimate the devastating effect of all the bureaucracy on many farmers, especially small family farmers who find all this form filling very difficult. The Minister will be aware of the many grievances that have resulted from forms being rejected because they were filled in wrongly. I have often investigated such cases and I am persuaded that the forms were not deliberately filled in incorrectly. They were wrong either because of poor guidance from MAFF officials or because of their sheer difficulty.

I leave the House with one final thought. In 1997, it is likely that there will be more deaths among farmers who commit suicide or die from stress-related illnesses brought about by bureaucracy and the strains of seeing their cattle needlessly destroyed than among people contracting CJD. Surely this is a case, if ever there was one, of the cure being infinitely worse than the disease.

1.13 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): I paused before rising, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) was able to start his speech early, and I should have been more than happy to give time to any other hon. Member who wanted to speak. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate, and I certainly understand the feeling with which he spoke. I heard his truncated interview on "Farming Today" this morning, and I acknowledge the vigour and sincerity with which he makes all his points.

Some weeks ago, the hon. Gentleman and I conducted an exchange across the Floor of the House to the effect that we need to treat this matter in an adult way. It is not a matter for party politics—but we still have to deal with the legacy that we have been left, and that limits our choices.

The hon. Gentleman was right to say that we must learn the lessons of this affair. Never again must Agriculture or Health Ministers precipitate food scares by the way in which they communicate risk. That is being given detailed attention by my colleagues in MAFF and the Department of Health. We are trying to learn the lessons of the past, and we, too, are practical people living in the real world. A change of Government does not mean that there will never be another food problem. We shall try to manage problems as they arise without causing the collapse of any industry or needlessly putting thousands out of work. Common sense is of the essence.

Certainly, the public need reassurance, which is why, later this year, we shall publish a White Paper on the setting up of an independent food standards agency, at arm's length from the Government but accountable to this House. That should lead to greater confidence on the part of the public and the industry. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that many hours of civil service and ministerial time are being devoted to the preparation of that document.

Mr. Gill: The food industry is greatly concerned that the new agency may include nutrition in its remit. That, the industry believes most strongly, is a matter for commercial judgment and decision. The risk is that standards and nutrition may get confused in the process.

Mr. Rooker: During the consultation period, Professor James has received well over 600 submissions. We have not ended consultation; the submissions are still coming in every week. They are all being considered and fed into the machine. Several people have written to Ministers on the subject of nutrition, but no decision has been taken on it yet: it is still under consideration. We fully expect the White Paper to include several green chapters, on which we are consulting further at the moment. We have no wish to be inflexible. Some issues are clearly in; others are clearly out. But there is a group in the middle on which we are more than happy to allow hon. Members and the industry to comment further, before we bring a Bill before the House.

A central plank of our policy is the restoration of confidence in food. The beef industry has taken a battering, but we are doing what we can actively to encourage consumers, based on the honest belief that beef produced in this country is safer than any other beef in the world.

We have taken steps to beef up the Meat Hygiene Service—the Ministry's policemen—to ensure that what goes on in slaughterhouses and meat-cutting plants fully complies with hygiene regulations. We recently closed down two plants on hygiene grounds, while the licences of certain other plants have been withdrawn on structural grounds. The service's officers do a difficult job. It is not easy to go into an abattoir and tell the owner or manager to slow down the line or else he will have to close down. We are giving officers all the powers that they need, and we fully intend to use them.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the over-30-months scheme. What he says is wholly reasonable, but 30 months is not an arbitrary figure; nor was it imposed by Europe. It was the recommendation of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee. The Government, like the previous Government, are duty bound to accept advice from independent scientists. I emphasise that they are not Ministry scientists, but independent scientists. As an aside, I might add that I relied on advice from independent scientists when making the recent decision on vitamin B6. Those people are not paid by the Ministry; the previous Government were right to rely on SEAC and we shall do the same.

The beef assurance scheme provides an opportunity for animals between 30 months and 42 months to be sold on the market, rather than being sent to over-30-months destruction. I realise that the scheme has never really taken off and, from my few short weeks of experience since coming to the Ministry, I believe that it has not been pushed.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Before the Minister leaves the subject of the over-30-months scheme, I should like to raise a few points in the same spirit as that adopted by my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) and the Minister. My hon. Friend raised the issues of the reduction in price and the cap of 560 kg. Will the Minister confirm that the 560-kg limit is the limit that the European Community funds, but that, until next week and under the previous Government's decision, the British Treasury funds the excess? Will the Minister tell the House now—or, if he cannot, will he undertake to write to me or to my hon. Friend—what relative savings he expects will arise from next week's changes, that is, the savings from the reduction in price and from the weight capping?

Mr. Rooker: I shall be more than happy to do that, but my recollection is that the information that the hon. Gentleman requests has already been given in answers to written parliamentary questions. I authorised one answer that provided information that had not previously been given on the expected savings from the changes that are envisaged.

Before I come to the subject of renderers, it is fair to say that the Intervention Board, which is an independent Government agency, carried out competitive tendering to get value for money in dealing with the over-30-months scheme. Although I understand why the hon. Member for Ludlow is aggrieved that there are no OTMS abattoirs left in Shropshire, there are a good number on the outskirts. I know that, because I listed them all in a parliamentary answer to the hon. Gentleman. The second large abattoir that I visited was in Shropshire, although it was not involved in the over-30-months scheme. I understand the hon. Gentleman's feelings, but the Intervention Board was duty bound to try to get value for money. Over the past three years, the sums paid out have declined considerably from the payments first made at the height of the BSE crisis.

The hon. Gentleman is quite right about the renderers subsidy, but I have to make it clear that we found that no money had been left behind to pay for it. The scheme was a one-off—£59 million for one year—and there is nothing in the kitty to pay for another year. If the scheme were to carry on, the money would have to come from some other element of the Ministry's support scheme for farmers. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced, we decided that, not having the money to extend the scheme past one year, we would withdraw the subsidy. All we are doing is coming to the end of the first year of a scheme for which money was provided for one year and not two, and that is that. I accept the consequences and realise that we cannot escape from the difficulties that the decision might cause.

The right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) asked about the date-based scheme. We are pressing that issue and we have put proposals for a date-based scheme to the European Commission. We are currently having informal discussions, and we shall report the results of those discussions to the House, or communicate them to hon. Members during the recess, as quickly as possible. The issue is not one which we can deploy in public, but we are pressing on every possible means of breaching the ban. The idea that we might end the ban all in one go is probably not realistic, so we are operating on several different fronts, and a date-based scheme is certainly one of those fronts.

Mr. Paice: Will the Minister confirm what he has just said? He said that the Government have made proposals to the Commission. I am aware of informal discussions going on, but my understanding is that the Government have not yet made formal proposals for a date-based scheme.

Mr. Rooker: I can confirm that, because I read it in my brief, but I shall put it on the record now. We are developing a new proposal for a date-based scheme and have put our ideas to the Commission. Details will be announced when the exploratory talks with the Commission have progressed and the Government are ready to put forward a formal proposal. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the opportunity to clarify that important issue.

The hon. Member for Ludlow, thinking of the future, talked about traceability and the tagging of cattle. I have discussed that with farmers, seen the taggers and heard the arguments about plastic and metal tags. It would appear that we shall probably have one plastic tag and one metal tag. I shall check when I get back to the Ministry, but it may well be that the relevant legislation is to be laid before the House today. We are actively pursuing that matter. We have got agreement on what we wanted: we were asked for two plastic tags, but all the indications were that, in this country, plastic tags do not work, for the reasons given by the hon. Gentleman. An electronic scheme is certainly an option down the track and must be borne in mind, but we cannot go for a Rolls-Royce job to start with. If we do that, we shall be in real trouble from day one.

On a positive note, it is worth remembering that one of the five preconditions of the Florence framework for lifting the ban was a centralised animal identification and movement recording system with official registration—what I shall now call the British cattle movement service. I am pleased to announce to the House that, earlier today, I decided that we were in a position to announce where the headquarters of that operation would be, because we are moving fast to get it set up and running by the end of March next year. Some time ago, my right hon. Friend the Minister asked me to decide on the location, and the decision was urgent if we were to meet our deadline.

I am pleased to announce that the headquarters of the British cattle movement service, which will be paid for by the industry, will be located in Workington, west Cumbria. It is part of my ministerial duty to ensure that the project is successful and gives value for money to the industry. My right hon. Friend the Minister has played no part in the choice of location, which is in a constituency adjoining his own, although Workington was once represented by Fred Peart, a former Labour Minister of Agriculture. The decision will bring value for money, coupled with clear advantages in terms of our regional, social and employment policies. More than 100 new jobs will be created in the operation of the scheme.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): On behalf of my constituents in Workington, I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for this enlightened decision, for which many of us have pressed for several years. We will make the scheme work. I also express my gratitude to the West Cumberland development agency and especially to John Grainger and Barbara Stephens for the excellent way in which they conducted themselves in bringing forward the bid.

Mr. Rooker: I thank my hon. Friend. As he knows, it was crucial that a decision was made on the location of the headquarters if we were to stand a chance of getting it up and running.

[Mr. Rooker]

The hon. Member for Ludlow raised several other issues in respect of the price of beef. His remarks about the market were absolutely right—producing beef for intervention is not a runner for the future and a market-led arrangement will have to be arrived at. The sooner that fact dawns on everybody, the better. Although I do not say that in the past schemes have been fudged at the edge, there is no doubt that, as different schemes have been introduced, farmers have adjusted their production in order to obtain the benefits. When the schemes are changed because of a crisis or because the European Commission decides to change things, the farmers get their fingers burnt. That is most unfortunate and I regret it.

It is important to produce a quality product at a quality price, so that the corner butcher's shop—there should be more of those—and the supermarket can sell with confidence to their customers, because they know which farm the beef came from and what the animal was fed on. Moreover, if ever a problem arises in future, better traceability systems will enable us to nip it in the bud straight away. There will be no need to search for cattle that may or may not be a problem for the food chain in future.

I shall write to the hon. Member for Ludlow in the early part of the recess about any points that I have not covered.

Ambulance Services (Powys)

1.29 pm

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire): I am confronted with every middle-aged Member's nightmare: my reading glasses went missing in the past hour and I am unable to read my speech. However, the Library has come to my rescue, and South and East Wales ambulance NHS trust will be put under the magnifying glass. It is especially appropriate as we are talking about the national health service and one might mention eye tests in passing. My eyesight is quite good and only requires a magnification of 1 or 1½, so I shall have a go and see how I get on.

I want to talk about the performance of the South and East Wales ambulance NHS trust in relation to Powys. It is not a tale that it should be proud of.

Wales is often unfairly referred to when drawing parallels with the size of a problem—rather larger than this magnifying glass, of course. Many disasters on the map of the world are said to take place in an area the size of Wales. In fact, Wales is much larger than people who live outside it—or people who live in certain corners of it—may realise. I do not know whether the House realises it, but the county of Powys is about 135 miles long. If it were placed lengthwise on the south of England it would stretch from the Severn bridge to Chiswick flyover. Given the number of constituencies that it would encompass, it is a massive area of territory.

The story of Powys in the past five years—under a different Administration—has not been a happy one. We have lost control of several services. Our fire service, which we used to control from Powys, is now operational from Carmarthen, as is our health authority. Effectively, 42 employees used to run Powys health authority from Bronllys in my constituency; almost all of that operation has closed down and now operates from Carmarthen. We were told last week that the Development Board for Rural Wales may be subsumed into the Welsh Development Agency; that may be the result of decision making in Cardiff.

Perhaps the most bizarre union took place at the time when the Conservative Government were manufacturing trusts at the rate of almost one a minute. There were effectively competitions to produce trusts. Some of the managers in Powys got empire building and when they moved to Cardiff they set their sights retrospectively on Powys and decided that they would build the South and East Wales ambulance NHS trust, a jumbo-sized ambulance trust, covering the huge area from Penarth in the south to within 10 miles of Wrexham in the north.

That decision set in train many events. We are distressed about what has happened. I shall do my best to describe some of the problems that we have witnessed in the past three or four years.

The ambulance trust was as dire as we had expected. It started in headquarters in Cardiff and moved to brand new headquarters in Pontypool—a state-of-the-art complex of the type that empire builders are encouraged to indulge in.

Most country people in Powys are blessed with a great deal of common sense, and forecast more or less immediately what would happen as a result of the creation of that jumbo-sized trust. The inevitable has occurred—an overspend, estimated to be £1.5 million to £2 million, resulting from the amalgamations.

Savings were then needed, and the middle management operating in Powys were sacked to save money. The middle management who operated Powys ambulance services so successfully in the 1980s and early 1990s did not run at a loss in any financial year. They were competent managers and ran the service with probity.

The trust became short of facilities, especially ambulances. A commitment had been made by contract with Dyfed Powys health authority that a certain number of ambulances would work in Powys. However, it was not beyond the imagination of SEWAT to transfer ambulances from the Crickhowell ambulance station in Powys to Cardiff to ferry patients from Cardiff royal infirmary to the university hospital of Wales, because of a shortage of ambulances. That had a knock-on, kickback effect into Powys, where extra cover had to be provided from Llandrindod to Brecon and Bronllys, which were providing cover for Crickhowell. I am told by operatives in Crickhowell that they spent most of their time working in Gwent, but Dyfed Powys health authority appears to being paying for all that.

This resulted eventually in Dyfed Powys health authority threatening SEWAT that it would terminate its contract forthwith because it was not providing the necessary service. The lively and intelligent people of Powys realised what was going on all along; 15,000 of them signed a petition in February, saying that they wanted their ambulance service back. The petition was stretchered up the steps of the Welsh Office in Cardiff. All 15,000 signatories were residents of Powys, who demanded a repatriation of their ambulance service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) and I took a further 16,000-name petition in early June—collected in conjunction with the *Shropshire Star*—concerning the closure of a communications centre in Newtown, to the Secretary of State at Gwydyr house in Whitehall. Altogether, therefore, 31,000 people in Powys have expressed on petitions their dissatisfaction with the service.

In the meantime, there has been an horrendous litany of cases of poor communications between Pontypool, where the centre is, and Powys. Mistakes have been made; place names have been confused. Perhaps the worst example that I can give is that an ambulance that was supposed to arrive in Bala road in Llanfyllin arrived in Bala in Gwynedd instead. That type of thing appears to have been happening because the people in Pontypool do not know the geography of Powys. Eventually, they came to their senses and imported three residents of Powys to operate the communications centre in Pontypool.

Perhaps the worst feature, however, is that for some reason it was decided to close the communications centre of SEWAT in Newtown. I regard that as an act of vandalism, because the Newtown centre was working extremely well and knew all parts of Powys. There was no delay in getting ambulances to the right place within the specified 21-minute turnaround time. The problem is that it was decided to close it down. However, not only was it closed down but equipment worth some £80,000 was removed from the centre and it will take some doing to get the communications centre put back in Newtown. We find that extraordinary, and it culminated in a disjointed communications system.

In late February, I went to the hospital in Llandrindod and was confronted with a doctor, a nurse and an upset lady in a bed who had been waiting for two days to go to Hereford for an operation because no ambulance was available to take her from Llandrindod to Hereford. The bed had been booked in Hereford hospital and the surgeon was waiting to perform the operation, but there was no ambulance. After three hours on the third day, no ambulance had yet shown up. Understandably, she was in some pain and needed the operation urgently.

What does the Minister intend to do about the re-configuration of ambulance services in Wales? I have a dossier of comments from every GP practice in my constituency about the ambulance service in Powys. I shall give just one example of the sort of thing that has been happening. In a letter to the chief executive of SEWAT, Mr. Morris from Brecon in my constituency said:

> "Between midnight and 1 am on the morning of Saturday 14th June Doctor Diane Davies made a 999 call to summon an ambulance to 26, Pendre Close, Brecon, Powys. My mother, Helena Mary Morris was very ill and needed to be taken to hospital.
>
> After some twenty minutes the ambulance had failed to arrive so Doctor Davies rang Brecon War Memorial Hospital where the ambulance is based. It emerged that the crew were completely unaware that they were needed."

They were less than a mile away from the patient. The letter went on:

> "They then immediately came to the assistance of my mother.
>
> Despite the efforts of Doctor Davies and the ambulance crew my mother passed away.
>
> I am very angry at what is such conspicuous incompetence on your organisation's part and I require an immediate explanation from you."

An explanation has been given, but it certainly does not match my constituent's description of what happened.

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that that case underlines the gravity of the problem? SEWAT's problems do not just lead to inconvenience; they may be endangering the lives of people in Powys and they will continue to do so until we have an absolute assurance that they will be resolved.

Mr. Livsey: I agree very much with what my hon. Friend said.

Dr. Harvey of Talgarth wrote to the Dyfed local management committee of the trust outlining the problems that had been experienced. He said:

> "Though we were informed that there was to be a change"—

in the operation of the ambulance service as a result of the removal of the control centre—

> "we actually were given one week's notice of the actual date of change.
>
> We had severe difficulty getting information from headquarters as all calls were diverted to an answer machine and we rarely received a reply."

He was referring to the doctor's answering service run by SEWAT. The GP practice in Knighton has given up on SEWAT, as have many GP practices in Powys, and is using a service operating out of Wolverhampton. Dr. Harvey goes on to say:

> "We were given five days notice that our original radios were no longer of any use and had to be replaced at the cost of £900.

[Mr. Livsey]

> On the first night (27 March) we know for a fact that a patient with abdominal pain had to wait two hours before the doctor received the message (this was a test call by one of our lady doctors' husband to see what their response time was!)"

I have pages and pages of that sort of information if the Minister would like to receive it from me. It covers not just February and March but April and May. We should like to know, first, that Powys ambulance services are detached from SEWAT where it has been proven beyond all reasonable doubt that SEWAT is far too large and unwieldy, and incapable of managing the service in Powys effectively; and, secondly, that ambulance services in Powys will be returned to management in Powys, if necessary as a devolved division of Powys NHS trust. Thirdly, will the Minister confirm that American consultants are being used to advise the Welsh Office about ambulance services in Wales and that there are plans for either three ambulance services or one service for the whole of Wales? Will the Minister guarantee to the people of Powys that their ambulance service will be administered from within Powys?

The maxim of all this must be: local knowledge saves lives. Nothing less will do.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Win Griffiths): I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has raised this important issue as it gives me an opportunity to respond to any concerns the residents of Powys might have about these vital services.

The Government regard ambulance provision as an integral and important part of the health service, providing a front-line, life-saving service to the people of Wales. It is appropriate at the outset to pay tribute to the ambulance men and women, control staff and all the other staff and management who play such an important role in this relatively small but key part of the national health service. I am only too aware of the increasing pressures that the ambulance service must deal with daily through increased numbers of emergency and urgent calls. In the face of the increasing work-load, the dedication of all those staff has been demonstrated time and again, and we all owe them a debt of gratitude.

The South and East Wales ambulance NHS trust—or SEWAT, as it is better known—is by far the largest provider of ambulance services in Wales, serving a population of more than 1 million people. Those services are provided throughout the unitary authority areas of Powys, Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Caerphilly, Newport, Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. Within that area, Powys accounts for some 10 per cent. of the trust's catchment population, with 122,000 residents living within a vast area of over 2,000 sq miles. If I may put that into context, the population of Cardiff currently stands at just over 300,000 within an area of just 54 sq miles. Clearly, the county of Powys needs special attention to cover such vast distances and address other problems associated with its rurality. Having been brought up in Powys, I am aware of all those matters. Indeed, I still have family in the town of Brecon, to which the hon. Gentleman referred when bringing a sad case to our attention.

SEWAT was formed on 1 April 1993 by the amalgamation of three county ambulance services. Since it was formed, I recognise that the trust has made efforts to improve performance standards across all the areas it serves. Despite increasing numbers of emergency calls, the trust has improved its performance against the existing standards for ambulance response times in Powys. Those standards dictate that for 95 per cent. of emergency calls an ambulance must arrive at the scene of an incident within 21 minutes. In the year to 31 March 1992, a total of 4,146 emergency calls were dealt with by the former provider of ambulance services for the area of the Powys health authority, with an 83 per cent. response within 21 minutes. By comparison, in the year to 31 March 1997, calls had increased by almost 10 per cent. to 4,424 and, despite this significant increase, the trust managed to improve its response times for the 21-minute standard to just over 90 per cent. Although that falls short of national standards in Wales and the trust is currently facing difficulties in reaching the required performance targets, I am sure that hon. Members will agree that in Powys the South and East Wales ambulance trust has made real progress since it was first established.

As hon. Members know, however, SEWAT has had more than its fair share of problems—poor management, loose and unacceptable financial control, substandard services in some areas and practices that have, on occasion, fallen well below the standards that we would all expect from a public body. We have made it clear to the SEWAT board that we expect things to change and, I am pleased to say, there is some evidence that that is happening.

Financially, the trust seems to be returning to a firmer footing and in a number of other areas concerned with the real business of the trust—I mean the services that it provides—the board is taking action to put right issues that have dogged its rather unfortunate history—none of which, I am pleased to say, this Government have been associated with.

I know that the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire and other hon. Members have been concerned about SEWAT's new command and control centre, which was developed as part of the trust's programme to upgrade and improve the facilities and services that it provides. In 1994, each of the three areas served by the trust had in place its own control centre. Those were based at Cardiff, Newtown and Caerleon and although they were still operable, as a result of lack of investment the trust had inherited aging and unreliable technology that was in urgent need of replacement. In the case of the then Gwent and South Glamorgan control centres the equipment was more than 10 years old, and in the case of Powys the equipment was due for replacement the following year.

The trust examined all possible options for replacing the equipment, including simply purchasing new equipment for each site. It concluded that the most appropriate route to follow was centralisation on a single site at Mamhilad. One of the major benefits to arise from centralisation was the elimination of the fragmentation of services within the trust. At the time, each ambulance division was acting in isolation from the others, with the result that cross-boundary co-operation was poor.

Such a situation was intolerable in a single trust. The buildings housing the previous control centres were in a poor state of repair and would have required major structural work to bring them up to their former standard. The trust considered that the resources would be better utilised to provide additional medical equipment and to train more ambulance staff.

Although there are benefits associated with the centralisation of control centre functions, there have been a number of significant teething problems, some of which have been raised in correspondence that I have received from the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire and from the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), who I see is in his place.

The decision of some staff at the last minute not to relocate from the Powys control centre to the new centre at Pontypool initially led to staff shortages and, coupled with technical difficulties, led to an increased number of problems for the trust. Those have now been addressed, following the recruitment of additional staff and the correction of difficulties with the technical equipment.

A number of operational measures have been introduced to help to resolve the trust's problems in relation to command and control. One of the most significant problems in dealing with the Powys area in the early stages of the implementation of the new control centre was the lack of geographical knowledge of the area, again partly due to the reluctance of staff to relocate. That led to a small number of calls being directed to the wrong location and caused some confusion and distress, not only for patients and their relatives, but for the ambulance crews who worked in those areas.

The trust has addressed the problem by ensuring that emergency calls from each of the three health authority areas served by the trust are handled separately. In addition, calls from GPs are handled by separate staff, as are calls relating to patient transport services.

Another major step that the trust has recently taken to eliminate the confusion caused by the lack of geographical knowledge of the control room staff is the purchase of a geographical information system. This allows staff to see on a single map the exact location of the caller and all the ambulances in that area, and to decide which ambulance should be assigned to the call and the length of time that it will take to arrive at the incident.

We should not forget the vital role played by the ambulance crews themselves. Their invaluable local knowledge allows them to reach the patient by taking the most appropriate route, and the same knowledge allows the patient to be transported to hospital, if necessary, by the quickest and safest route.

The importance that the trust places on ensuring that those and other problems are dealt with swiftly in Powys is clearly demonstrated by its willingness to work with other local health providers. It has established a development group which is chaired by the trust's own director of operations and includes representatives of the Dyfed Powys health authority, the local medical committee and the Powys Healthcare Trust.

The group seeks to address concerns over performance measures, standards and protocols for the ambulance service in the Powys area. It is also a useful tool for the trust to rebuild relationships with those organisations after the recent difficulties in the Powys area. I firmly believe that the only way in which health services of any kind can be provided effectively is through co-operation between all health care agencies, and I applaud the trust's efforts in that respect.

Welsh Office officials have been, and remain, in close touch with the chairman and chief executive of SEWAT and, having seen the new facilities, were very impressed with the technology and systems employed and the capability of the staff. I have been informed by the chief executive of the trust that he would be pleased to welcome the hon. Gentleman to the trust headquarters to view the new command and control centre and to discuss any issues that he might wish to raise, and I recommend that he take up the offer. I am aware that the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire is taking advantage of a similar offer and will be visiting the trust on 12 August.

Performance standards are an important indicator of how well an ambulance trust is providing services to the population. However, the current standards tell us only how quickly an ambulance arrives at the scene of an incident; they do not give us details of the usefulness of the ambulance upon arrival, or the actual outcome for the patient following the intervention of ambulance personnel. For that reason, the Government are examining the financial and operational consequences of introducing new criteria-based performance standards in Wales.

The new standards would be based around the need for ambulance services to categorise calls according to urgency and medical need. The highest priority would be reserved for immediately life-threatening conditions such as a heart attack. We hope that that will help us to provide an even better service.

Because of their uniqueness, I accept that such new standards would mean significant challenges for the trust in the Powys area. However, I would look to the health authority and the trust to rise to the challenge and meet any exacting new standards that we decide to introduce.

Mr. Livsey: In the light of his speech, will the Minister tell us whether he is satisfied with SEWAT's performance, or are we due for another review of the configuration of ambulance services in Wales? Is there shortly to be a new configuration?

Mr. Griffiths: I am not satisfied with the way in which SEWAT has been operating. Although it has greatly improved, from as late as May this year I have a three-page catalogue of complaints about the way in which the service operated. Those complaints come from hon. Members, people in the health service and even Machynlleth town council. Many bodies have complained. I can only apologise for what has happened and express my regrets about cases in which there were serious outcomes because of the failures of the trust to act properly.

More paramedics are being trained. There are now 37, and there will be a further four by the end of October. I look forward to significant improvements.

With regard to the review of the ambulance service configuration, it was widely reported last Friday that the Welsh ambulance policy advisory group had recommended a new configuration for ambulance services in Wales. There have been reports in the press of either

[Mr. Griffiths]

one service or three services. It is too early for me to respond to the report. The proposals are undoubtedly radical, and I will want to consider them and have further discussions. I would welcome further observations from Opposition Members or my hon. Friends about the reconfiguration of ambulance services in Wales. An announcement will be made in the not-too-distant future.

I repeat that I am only too well aware of the problems facing SEWAT in the Powys area and the major steps being taken by the trust to address those problems. I am informed that the earlier difficulties experienced with the introduction of the new command and control centre are being overcome. I expect the people of Powys to have an ambulance service that fully meets their needs and of which they can be proud. Notwithstanding that, I appreciate the need to reshape the ambulance service in Wales so that all people can receive a better service.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Freedom of Information

1. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what actions he has taken to improve public access to Government information. [9706]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Dr. David Clark): The manifesto on which we were elected made it clear that we must rebuild the British people's trust in the way the Government work. Central to this is our commitment to more open government. We shall introduce freedom of information legislation to improve access to Government information. The need to improve access and accountability underpins our reform of the charter programme. We are actively pursuing developments in information technology to enhance and extend the ways in which people can obtain information on Government services.

Dr. Jones: We appreciate that it will take time to enact legislation. In the meantime, will my right hon. Friend look at ways of bolstering the existing code of practice? For example, will he consider amending the usual practice of not disclosing legal advice to the Government? I am thinking of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General's recent refusal, in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), to disclose his legal opinion on arms sales to Indonesia. It is difficult to see how any possible harm arising from such disclosure could outweigh the public's right to know.

Dr. Clark: We have already said that we shall try to examine the code of practice in a more liberal vein. Our priority is to press ahead with freedom of information legislation. That means that most of our resources have been involved in preparing that piece of legislation, not in overhauling the code.

Mr. Baker: In looking to improve public access to Government information, will the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster consider the role played by the Minister without Portfolio, who is allegedly responsible to the House through written questions only, notwithstanding the statement by the Leader of the House last week? Will the right hon. Gentleman reflect on the fact that the Minister without Portfolio has refused to give details of journeys he has undertaken at public expense and details of meetings that he has undertaken on behalf of the Government—in fact, he has refused to give any details whatsoever? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Minister without Portfolio is becoming the Minister without accountability?

Dr. Clark: I cannot answer for the Minister without Portfolio. He answers written questions put to him by hon. Members and I understand that he has a slot in the time allocated to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in order to answer oral questions in the House regarding his responsibilities for the millennium dome.

Mr. Thompson: While I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's assertions about more open government, will he instruct the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to encourage more open government in Northern Ireland, especially in relation to the Maryfield secretariat and the meetings of the Irish and British council?

Dr. Clark: I may have many powers, but I do not have the power to instruct my right hon. Friend. However, I am sure that she will take note of the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mrs. Shephard: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain to the House how his plans to improve public access to Government information will be implemented in respect of the new joint consultative Cabinet Committee when the Prime Minister admitted yesterday in a written answer that he cannot yet set out its terms of reference? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us how that contributes to open government?

Dr. Clark: We have followed the practice of the previous Government in publishing information about the membership of the various Cabinet Committees and we shall continue to do so. We shall continue to give as much information as we possibly can.

2. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his plans to publish a freedom of information Bill. [9707]

Dr. David Clark: I intend to publish a draft freedom of information Bill early in the new year, which will follow a consultative period after the freedom of information White Paper.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful that my right hon. Friend says that because we need a Bill with a definite timetable in this Session. I do not know why he does not take off the peg the Bill proposed earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), now the Minister for Arts, which seemed pretty good to me. The important principle that he should bear in mind is not that it should be watered down but that it should be enforced by an independent commissioner rather than by a House of Commons Committee with a Government majority.

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend has almost made the case for our not having legislation in this Session. We must get the legislation right. It is no use having a half-baked scheme. My hon. Friend has just raised one of the many issues on which it is right and proper that there should be debate, not only in the House but across the nation.

3. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his responsibilities for freedom of information in respect of matters relating to Scotland. [9708]

Dr. David Clark: Our proposed freedom of information Act would have application throughout the UK, but, on the assumption that the Scottish people will vote for a Scottish Parliament in September and that Parliament will approve the legislation, it will be for the Scottish Parliament itself to determine the approach of the Scottish Executive and Scottish public bodies to openness and freedom of information in areas of devolved competence.

Mr. Dalyell: In that case, who resolves differences of opinion between Westminster and Edinburgh?

Dr. Clark: There would, in effect, be two areas of jurisdiction, depending on whether the information in question related to a matter that is reserved or devolved. The law applying to reserved matters would be for Westminster and it would be for the Scottish Parliament to decide and legislate on the level of disclosure on devolved activities carried out in its name.

Sir Patrick Cormack: A moment or two ago, the right hon. Gentleman said he did not want to have anything to do with half-baked schemes. Is not this a classic example of a half-baked scheme? What will be the precise responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Scotland to the House in this matter?

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman's point is covered. Other countries have similar situations. A situation similar to that which exists in the United States of America would apply where there is a central freedom of information Act and, in addition, different Acts relating to it in various states. The United States has two jurisdictions, as will Britain.

Civil Service (Recruitment)

4. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to review the method of recruitment of civil servants. [9709]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): I have no such plans.

Mrs. Gorman: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that among the many achievements of the previous Government was the reduction by 35 per cent. in the number of civil servants by natural wastage? Will he also confirm that the Government's plan to break up the United Kingdom and establish new Assemblies and Parliaments all over the place will inevitably lead to an increase in the number of civil servants—100 more for the Welsh Assembly and 500 more for the Scottish Parliament? Will he tell British taxpayers that those recruits will be obtained by closing the Scottish and Welsh Offices in London because they will not be needed any more?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I can assure the hon. Lady that there are no plans to have other than a unified civil service, that there are no plans afoot either to shed members of the various Departments—

Mrs. Gorman: They have to be shed.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The hon. Lady has to make up her mind whether she wants people to be sacked or retained to make the kind of contribution that we would expect them to make, as the majority of civil servants do. The hon. Lady referred to the previous Government. She knows that they managed to transfer 388,000 civil servants to agencies. We are concerned to maintain a professional civil service that is recruited on the basis of fair and open competition. That will apply to the recruitment of civil servants in the future, as it has in the past.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: One civil servant, the Cabinet Secretary, is to retire at the end of this year. Will the Government look closely at the best methods of recruiting a new Cabinet Secretary, whether it be by the use of headhunters, by advertising or by the traditional method of appointing from within the civil service?

Mr. Kilfoyle: The recruitment of the new Cabinet Secretary is a matter for the civil service and the Prime Minister. We have no objection to using headhunters to advise us, in addition to open advertisements for jobs.

Mr. Hogg: With reference to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), may I put it to the hon. Gentleman that he should have calculated how many civil servants will be retained in the Scottish Office as now is, and how many will be transferred to the departments that will be responsible to the Scottish Parliament? My hon. Friend would like to know what the numbers will be both ways. Surely the House is entitled to an answer.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The House will get the answer at the appropriate time when the calculations have been made.

Electronic Information

5. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to permit individuals to supply information to the Government electronically. [9710]

Dr. David Clark: Information technology will revolutionise the way in which citizens relate to government. I am conscious of the success of the child benefit scheme promoted by my hon. Friend in Cambridgeshire. We intend to expand such imaginative schemes. It is a matter of great regret that the previous Government did not have the guts to pick up such projects and run with them.

Mrs. Campbell: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply and I am grateful for the interest that he has shown in the project that I pioneered in Cambridgeshire. If we look forward a little, there will be a time quite soon when people will expect to make their tax returns or even their benefit claims through information technology. It would be nice to know whether the Government have any plans to develop those areas.

Dr. Clark: Yes, indeed. One can look at information technology in three ways. First, we use it to modernise our Departments and make us more efficient. Secondly, we have tried to use it to provide information on public services. Thirdly, there is scope for the delivery of public services by electronic means. If the technology moves apace, as it has in the banking world, a large percentage of Government services could be dealt with by electronic means in the near future. One or two pilot schemes are in operation and we hope to put them into full service within the next two years.

Charters

6. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to reform the programme of charters. [9711]

Mr. Kilfoyle: As we announced in June, we are relaunching the programme as part of our wider initiative to improve government. We have already begun a series of visits and meetings to discuss with ordinary people—both users and service providers—how we can make the programme more meaningful and help to ensure the delivery of better public services.

Mr. Hanson: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the failures of the Conservative Government's citizens charter programme was that it was essentially a top-down process without any involvement from local people at local level? Will he outline his plans to ensure that real people have real discussions about what those standards mean and that they have real, enforceable rights?

Mr. Forth: Real focus groups.

Mr. Kilfoyle: We intend to introduce a people's panel, which will, indeed, use focus groups. It will also use citizens juries, deliberative polling and telephone interviews. We want to find out what ordinary people want, not what the self-appointed great and good want. The previous Government—that lot over there, who do not use public transport and who use private education and private health care—told others what they ought to have rather than giving them what they wanted.

Mr. Rowe: As the Government claim that their priorities are education, education, education, can we now look forward to a seriously enforceable contract with schools obliging them to deliver something that the public really need and want? Education must be one of the last remaining sectors in which there is an implied contract with the public but absolutely no obligation on schools to deliver.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The hon. Gentleman will know that an increasing number of the 645 charter mark holders are schools. There are 944 applications in the pipeline, including many from schools that see the benefits of obtaining charter marks and assessing their ability to deliver a wider service in their communities.

Freedom of Information

7. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to introduce freedom of information legislation. [9713]

Dr. David Clark: I plan to publish a draft freedom of information Bill in the new year.

Mr. Corbyn: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many people will welcome the prospect of genuine freedom of information legislation? Will he ensure that that legislation covers all aspects of the work of the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry so that it will be possible to find out the true cost of the Trident nuclear missile system and the true amount of the subsidy provided for the arms industry and arms exports? Past Governments have consistently refused to reveal the real cost of the arms industry to our economy.

Dr. Clark: It is important for us to consult as widely as possible on freedom of information legislation, but I warn my hon. Friend that there will have to be exemptions—as there are in every freedom of information Act anywhere in the world. There are issues affecting the security of our nation, and others, on which we cannot provide information freely and fully.

9. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his White Paper on freedom of information. [9715]

Dr. David Clark: As the House will know, I had originally hoped to be able to publish a freedom of information White Paper before the summer recess, but I am afraid that that simply has not proved possible.

Mr. Canavan: May we have an assurance that the White Paper will end, once and for all, the scandal whereby MI5, MI6 and certain Departments—particularly the Ministry of Defence—have for years been allowed to behave like secret societies, to such an extent that people in this country have had to resort to United States freedom of information legislation to find out what is happening here?

Dr. Clark: I think that the new freedom of information legislation will change the culture of politics in Whitehall. It will introduce the presumption that information will be available to individuals unless there are good reasons for it not to be. We will, of course, study examples in the United States and other countries along with Westminster models to get the balance right, so that the individual can have as much freedom as possible without harming our country's interests.

Mr. Keith Simpson: Will the Minister stiffen up that rather mealy-mouthed answer? Some Opposition Members—and, I hope, some Labour Members—actually believe that certain areas of national security should remain secret and should not be wide open to people who might undermine our society. Before some hon. Members turn that into a joke, let me remind the House that we are fighting terrorism in one part of the United Kingdom. That is not a joke.

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman ought to have listened a little more attentively. I made it clear that nothing would be revealed if it affected the security of our nation.

Mr. Derek Foster: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in the wake of the Scott report, which revealed a disturbing culture of secrecy and endemic dissembling as being endemic in our system of government, freedom of information legislation became an integral part of the Prime Minister's agenda of restoring trust with the British people? If that is true, will my right hon. Friend, with the Prime Minister's full authority, root out any resistance to freedom of information legislation wherever it lies in the Government?

Dr. Clark: I will certainly do that. I passionately believe in the legislation: it will do a great deal to restore trust between the citizens of Britain and us the Government.

Food Standards Agency

10. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to publish his proposals for a food standards agency. [9716]

Dr. David Clark: The Government propose to publish a White Paper in the autumn and intend to introduce legislation to establish a food standards agency as soon as legislative time allows. The legislation will be based on the excellent work of Professor James to which there have been more than 650 responses in a consultative exercise that was launched by the Government. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will today make a statement on the responses received to Professor James's report on an agency and on measures being taken in the interim to improve food safety arrangements.

Mr. Paice: May I take it that it will be two or three years before the agency is up and running? In the meantime, what are the Government and the right hon. Gentleman doing to ensure that the safety of British food is properly communicated? In particular, what is he doing about the many Labour-controlled local education authorities that are still banning the use of beef in school meals despite the fact that the Minister and his colleagues rightly declare that British beef is safe?

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman is right to remind the House of the scandalous state into which the Conservative Government brought the reputation of British food. I chair the Cabinet Committee that is overseeing the situation. We have put in place interim arrangements to rectify the situation and we think that they will be able to deal with any food incidents that occur. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has brought together all his civil servants who deal with food under one management chain, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will soon make further announcements on how he intends to reorganise his Department to deal more effectively with food safety. I concede that the Government have a terrible legacy from the Conservatives, but the Labour Government will put it right.

Mr. Tyler: Can the Chancellor be more specific about the timetable? He has acknowledged that there will be a period for consultation on the White Paper and that that will be followed by legislation. It is likely that the new agency will not be in operation until April 2000. In the meantime, the situation is deteriorating. I accept the right hon. Gentleman's point that that is a legacy from the previous regime, but there is a crisis of confidence in food safety in the United Kingdom now and worry about the import of substandard food—notably beef—from other countries. I press the right hon. Gentleman to tell us what action plan he and his colleagues have now to improve confidence in British food because lack of confidence, which is surely unjustified and perhaps irrational, nevertheless exists.

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. A great deal of the public's lack of confidence in British food is unjustified because it and some of the standards that apply to it are very high. Some Opposition Members shared our pleasure when my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food achieved success in Brussels to ensure that the standards that apply in abattoirs and to beef coming to Britain are the same as those that apply in Britain. We have put in place new, interim measures to bring together the scientists and food experts in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health under a unified chain of command to try to ensure that they can respond more effectively. Further suggestions and improvements will be announced this afternoon by my right hon. Friend.

Focus Groups

11. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of the proposed arrangements for consulting focus groups. [9717]

Mr. Kilfoyle: We are currently considering ways of consulting and involving ordinary people more in decisions about the delivery of public services. Ideas are at an early stage and I am therefore unable to give estimated costs, but costs to my Department would be met from within existing budgets.

Mr. Jenkin: Under what parliamentary vote would the Minister be spending that money?

Mr. Kilfoyle: It would be the vote accorded to the Cabinet Office (Office of Public Service).

Mr. David Heath: Will the Minister consider arranging for a focus group to be brought together in Somerset so that he can find out whether among ordinary people, as his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy described them earlier, he can find one person who agrees that Somerset county council should be meeting today to reduce its local government expenditure, cutting teachers' jobs and reducing social services as a result of Government diktat, rather than following the expressed wishes of the people through the ballot box?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I would not dream of commenting on the decisions made by Somerset county council, but I will certainly consider Somerset as a potential venue for one of the focus groups that we shall convene in order to find out what people think of the public services on offer.

Mr. Coaker: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in contrast to the cynicism of Opposition Members, the real purpose of focus groups is to improve legislation and policy by finding out what people really think about what the Government are doing? Is not that the way forward for a Government who want to listen and to understand what people have to say? Are not focus groups, far from being the joke that the Opposition seem to think they are, a way forward for the Government which will be welcomed by most people?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I agree that focus groups are one tool which we can use to find out what people want—rather than do as the previous Government did and tell people what they ought to have. It is a bit rich for a Conservative

Member to criticise a party with an overwhelming mandate that wants to rebuild the bond of trust with the people.

Mr. Gray: I was interested to hear the Minister refer earlier to the people's panel. Does he agree that there is already a people's panel and that this is it? Why does he need another?

Mr. Kilfoyle: When we produce our White Paper on better government, we shall talk about accountability, accessibility, responsiveness, efficiency and open government. Parliamentary accountability will be a key element in that.

Freedom of Information

12. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his Department's White Paper on freedom of information. [9718]

Dr. David Clark: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan).

Mr. Mackinlay: When my right hon. Friend hears Conservative Members praying in aid the nation's security as a way of objecting to the freedom of information legislation that he proposes, does it occur to him that that is Toryspeak for "Please don't reveal the files from the past 18 years"? They must be thinking of items such as Westland, guns to Iraq and some of the peculiar activities of some of the deep forces in the security forces during the industrial relations disputes of years past.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is necessary for us to have full disclosure and to abandon the absurd and undemocratic 30-year rule on the disclosure of public records? Should not we have transparency of government with regard not only to the Tories' stewardship over the past 18 years but to future Governments, too? Will my right hon. Friend end the 30-year rule—an action which would make for a more democratic society in which records were disclosed early?

Dr. Clark: I am actively examining the 30-year rule with a great deal of sympathy for the idea of deciding how we can relax it. There are massive cost and resource implications, and although I hope that we can make progress it may have to take place incrementally.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the right hon. Gentleman consider in the White Paper the rule that stops one Government seeing the files of another? Was it not rather difficult for the previous Government to justify the sale of Hawk jets to Indonesia when the decision was made under the previous Labour Administration, a few years after the invasion of East Timor? Will the right hon. Gentleman now publish the advice that was given, with special reference to the ambassador in Indonesia who seemed to think that it was a good idea for the Indonesians to invade East Timor? Let us have it all out in the open.

Dr. Clark: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks. The agreement that files from outgoing Governments be closed is a long-standing convention of the House and of government, and it would be inadvisable to change it. If we do relax the 30-year rule, it is more likely that the information that he seeks will be made available. That goes without saying.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Sir Michael Spicer:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 30 July. [9736]

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I attended a meeting of the Labour party's national executive. I had meetings with Cabinet colleagues and others. Later today, I shall host a reception at 10 Downing street.

Sir Michael Spicer: Looking back on the past 96 days, and with the benefit of hindsight, what does the Prime Minister think has been his worst mistake—losing control over interest rates, raiding pension funds, robbing the reserves, or what?

The Prime Minister: Certainly our greatest triumph has been to remove the Conservative Government. As for my greatest mistake, that is for me to know and for the hon. Gentleman to find out.

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: Will the Prime Minister join me in expressing sympathy for all those killed and injured by the appalling bomb in Jerusalem this morning? Will he urge all those involved in the middle east peace process to continue their efforts towards a lasting peace?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I am sure that I speak for everyone in the House when I express my deepest sympathy for all those families who are bereaved in Israel today and for the families of those injured. It was an appalling terrorist outrage. Our deepest condolences go to the people of Israel and to the Jewish community in this country. I can assure my hon. Friend that we will continue to do all we can to work for peace in the middle east.

Mr. Hague: On behalf of the Opposition, I should like to associate myself with the Prime Minister's last remarks.

Given the statement of the Financial Secretary yesterday that the Government would investigate tax avoidance schemes relating to offshore trusts in Jersey, what advice does the Prime Minister have for the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe, the noble Lord Simon, who has £1 million invested in an offshore trust in Jersey in order to pay less tax?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that there has been any more vile and scurrilous campaign than the one mounted against David Simon. This is a man who has given up earning hundreds of thousands of pounds a year to serve the Government and to give public service, and has done so without any payment at all. Instead of vilifying him, the Conservative party should support that initiative. It only shows how remote the Conservative party is from the business community that it should attack him in that way.

Mr. Hague: Is there not a strong smell of hypocrisy coming from the Government? Does the Prime Minister recall his policy statement three years ago, which said:

> "All governments owe it to their people to take action against the persistent few who . . . shelter their wealth overseas",

and made specific reference to Jersey? Is it not breathtaking hypocrisy to criticise that and then for a Minister to take advantage of it? Is it not time that members of the Government stopped preaching one thing and doing another?

The Prime Minister: The ones who have been preaching one thing and doing another are Conservative Members who say that they want close links with business, but vilify a business person who comes in to give service free to his country. Lord Simon will be subject to the same rules as everybody else. The campaign mounted by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) is absolutely disgraceful, and I am surprised that the Leader of the Opposition associates himself with it.

Mr. Hague: The fact that a Minister is not taking any payment does not mean that he does not have to follow everybody else's rules. What advice has the Prime Minister given to the Minister about the suitability of handling gas liberalisation and energy taxation while hanging on to £2 million-worth of shares in BP? Does the Prime Minister think that that is an acceptable conflict of interest?

The Prime Minister: The Minister has obeyed all the rules all the way throughout. If the right hon. Gentleman knows of anything to the contrary, perhaps he will come to the Dispatch Box and say so. The Minister has retained the BP shares because he is obliged to do so. Having been the chairman of BP, if he got rid of them he would fall foul of the rules on insider trading. That is precisely what happened in the case of the former Deputy Prime Minister and of Paul Channon, now Lord Channon. If the right hon. Gentleman knows of any case in which the Minister has disobeyed the rules, let him come to the Dispatch Box and say so, or withdraw that slur.

Mr. Hague: Is the Prime Minister aware that "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" states:

> "Where there is a doubt it will almost always be better to relinquish or dispose of the interest but in such cases the Prime Minister must be the final judge"?

Will the Prime Minister tell us how he reconciles the European Union documents which I have here, on agreement on liberalisation of gas supply and restructuring the Community framework for the taxation of energy products, with holding £2 million-worth of shares in one of the world's largest energy companies?

The Prime Minister: That is really not good enough. If the right hon. Gentleman is going to make an allegation of that nature, it is not good enough. I have explained why the shares were not disposed of—because it would have been wrong to dispose of them. The Minister was acting on the advice of the permanent secretary at the Department of Trade and Industry and entirely in accordance with the rules of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". If the right hon. Gentleman has any evidence at all of any rule broken, let him say so. The past Conservative Government indulged in appalling conduct, but just because they did it does not mean that they can slur us with doing what they used to do.

Mr. Hague: Was it not foolish of the Prime Minister to place the hon. Gentleman in a position where he is the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness of the United Kingdom, but is not supposed to take decisions that have a bearing on one of the country's largest companies? Has the Prime Minister not noticed that even his hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing)—he knows a thing or two about shareholding—has said this morning

> "I think that people like Lord Simon . . . Either . . . must divest themselves of their shares, or divest themselves of office in Her Majesty's Government"?

Is that not a fair statement?

The Prime Minister: No, it is not a fair statement, for the reason that I have just given. I asked the right hon. Gentleman, quite specifically, to state what rule had been broken—three times I asked him and he failed to do so. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) will be out in a moment.

The Prime Minister: I asked the Leader of the Opposition to state what rule had been broken, and he failed to do so because no rule has been broken. The Minister has behaved with complete propriety throughout. He has followed precisely the procedure that was followed in the case of the Deputy Prime Minister in the previous Government. I really think that the right hon. Gentleman should go away and grow up and ask more sensible questions.

Mr. Hague: When the Prime Minister gets patronising, Madam Speaker, you know that he has lost the argument. The fact is that the Minister has held shareholdings in BP while appearing to make decisions that would have related to BP. Is it not time that the Prime Minister got a grip on that matter and took a leaf out of the BP annual accounts, written by the noble Lord himself, which state:

> "Only the highest standards of . . . openness and accountability will do"?

Is not that the standard by which the Government should be judged?

The Prime Minister: My noble Friend has maintained the highest standards of openness and probity. For the fourth time, the right hon. Gentleman has come to the Dispatch Box and failed to say what rule has been broken; if he believes that rules have been broken, perhaps he should go outside the House and repeat that allegation where it can be properly tested. He will not do so, because he knows that he cannot. He was part of a Government who fell beneath the proper standards. Lord Simon has behaved with complete probity and acted on proper advice throughout. The fact that the Conservative party is attacking him for working for free in the public service shows how remote it is from business people in Britain today.

Ms Stuart: I welcome the Government's initiative to set up literacy summer schools—two schools in my constituency will benefit—but how will we monitor their success and their long-term viability?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: it is an important initiative. It will enable us to raise standards of literacy and numeracy in our schools which, I am afraid, are still far below those in other countries. Indeed, it is the sad case that almost 50 per cent. of our 11-year-olds do not reach the proper standards of literacy and numeracy. The literacy summer schools will be part of the programme that will help to raise standards. That is the only way of getting the 21st-century education that we want and deserve.

Lichfield, Burntwood and District

Q2. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the long-term effects of Her Majesty's Government's policies on the people and businesses of the city of Lichfield, Burntwood and the surrounding district. [9737]

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to say that many benefits will have been noticed by the hon. Gentleman's constituents, including the 350 young people in Lichfield who are unemployed, some of whom will benefit from the welfare-to-work programme; the 10,000 people in Lichfield on the national health service waiting lists, who will benefit from the cuts in bureaucracy and the extra £1.2 billion going into the health service next year; and the 600 or more five, six and seven-year-olds in his constituency who are taught in class sizes of more than 30. Added to the cut in corporation tax, that is a very good deal for his constituents.

Mr. Fabricant: Notwithstanding that answer, is the Prime Minister aware of the feeling of injustice in Staffordshire over the amount that is paid per pupil in Staffordshire schools? Is he aware that Staffordshire is at the very bottom of the list of shire counties? That is the view of both Government and Opposition Members with Staffordshire constituencies.

The previous Government conducted a review of different ways of calculating the standard spending assessment. It was not a successful review from Staffordshire's point of view. What can the Prime Minister offer the people of Staffordshire? Can he tell parents in Staffordshire that there will be fairness in the amount given per pupil?

The Prime Minister: I obviously cannot make specific commitments on financing, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that there was great concern throughout the country about the way in which the standard assessment was being done, not least when people compared, for example, what was given to Westminster with what was given to other authorities. We are considering how the system can be made fairer. I believe that people in the hon. Gentleman's area, like people elsewhere in the country, will benefit from the considerable increase in expenditure on education announced in the Budget.

Engagements

Q3. **Mr. Beith:** Does the Prime Minister recall that, before the general election, he gave strong support to the case for dualling the A1 from Newcastle to Edinburgh and that shadow Ministers put it in writing that it would not be affected by any moratorium or review of the roads programme? Does he still agree that the gap in the strategic road system—the only all-weather route between London and Edinburgh—ought not to remain, and will he make that known to Ministers, because there seems to be some delay? [9738]

The Prime Minister: It is a stretch of road with which I am well familiar, and the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that dualling that part of the A1 is an important item. He will know that that is currently under consideration. We cannot guarantee a successful outcome, but it is essential that the right infrastructure links are maintained in that part of the world, because it is extremely important for the business that crosses the border between Scotland and England.

Q4. **Mr. Tipping:** Is it not clear that one of the most damning legacies of the Tory years is the state of disrepair of our schools? In Nottinghamshire alone, there are £111 million-worth of outstanding repairs. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that local education authorities make urgent bids for the £1 billion announced today, so that at least a start can be made on rebuilding our schools? It must be the case that investment in education is investment in the future. [9739]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course, the money that has been given—more than £1 billion for the school repairs programme over the lifetime of this Parliament—is the biggest programme that has been introduced for many years. I urge local education authorities and schools to submit their plans so that we can put our schools into a proper state of repair. Many school buildings and many schools in the country fall way beneath what is acceptable if our children are to be taught properly. I am delighted at the announcement today. I hope that my hon. Friend, others of my hon. Friends, and Opposition Members will encourage local education authorities to come forward with proposals.

Mr. Ashdown: May I, in this last Prime Minister's Questions before the summer recess, bring the Prime Minister back to an issue on which his Government have been rather coy over the summer, but which I believe will dominate our politics in the winter? If I were to say to the Prime Minister that one of his Health Ministers has now announced that his Government will spend £350 million less next winter on the health service than the outgoing Conservative Government would have done, would he be surprised?

The Prime Minister: As I have already said, we have inherited the spending plans of the previous Administration. We are sticking to those, but we are putting in the colossal sum of £1.2 billion extra next year. [HON. MEMBERS: "Next year."] Yes, I know that that is next year. We have inherited the proposals of the previous Government for this year, but the money for next year is helping health authorities to plan ahead. Of course, as a result of the changes that are being made, we are gradually reducing the huge burdens of bureaucracy in the internal market that the Conservatives introduced, and which we want to abandon.

Mr. Ashdown: But the right hon. Gentleman precisely has not inherited the previous Government's figures. He has reduced them by the impact of inflation. In case he has forgotten, that was precisely specified in a parliamentary answer given on 7 July. Unfortunately for our hospitals, there is to be a reduction of £350 million against what the previous Government spent. Let me put a more specific question to the Prime Minister. One of his personal five early promises to the electorate at the election was that he would cut waiting lists. Will waiting lists be cut this winter?

The Prime Minister: It is precisely in order to cut waiting lists that we have taken the measures that we have already outlined to cut bureaucracy. The plans that we have inherited are precisely the plans that we are putting through, but more money is going into the NHS as a result of the decisions announced in the Budget. I know that decisions on public finance are difficult, but, in the past few weeks, the hon. Gentleman's party has called for greater expenditure on local government, pensions, young people, health and education. With the best will in the world, we have to make sure that we make the arrangements necessary to bring the large budget deficit down. Within that, the Government will put extra resources into the health service by getting rid of the internal market and by giving more cash to the NHS.

Q5. **Mrs. Gilroy:** Does my right hon. Friend understand the real anger that South West Water consumers feel at their high water bills, especially as they are imposed by a company that, although it said a few weeks ago that it could not afford the windfall tax without borrowing money, has found £9 million to buy an American firm, and at yesterday's annual general meeting confirmed that it would pay out the highest dividends ever—20 per cent. more than last year? Does my right hon. Friend share with me the wish that the review that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has in hand on utility regulation will ensure that consumers have much more robust representation of their interests? [9740]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is, of course, right. Part of the purpose of the review is to make sure that we construct a long-term framework that is fair to consumers as well as shareholders. Since water privatisation, water and sewerage bills have risen far above the rate of inflation. The profits and dividends of those leading utility companies confirm that we were right to say that the windfall tax could be paid and that we could give our young people the skills and jobs that they needed.

Q6. **Mr. Wells:** Does the Prime Minister agree with Dr. Festing of Friends of the Earth that Labour has already begun to betray its green promises? Will he condemn the proposals of the Minister for London and Construction and Labour-dominated Hertfordshire county council to build thousands and thousands of houses in the green belt? [9741]

The Prime Minister: That is absolute nonsense. When one investigated the reports in the newspapers that we had announced some great new policy on the green belt, one discovered that that policy is based on the Green Paper published in November by the hon. Gentleman's Government. The policy of this Government has not changed since the policy of the previous Government, so if the hon. Gentleman is criticising us, he must be criticising them, too. I suspect that his question is based on a misapprehension.

Q7. **Mr. Pond:** Is the Prime Minister aware that, only in the past few hours, the contract has been signed for the brand new £115 million hospital for Dartford and Gravesham, breaking the Tory logjam on the construction of new hospitals? It will provide the hospital for which my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) have campaigned for so long and which they richly deserve. Will he now ensure that the remaining 13 projects under the revamped private finance initiative are brought forward quickly so that people in other areas, in common with my constituents, can see that, whereas the previous Government made promises, this Government keep them? [9742]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am delighted at the news that the contract has been signed for the Dartford and Gravesham hospital. We will make progress on the other 13 remaining projects as quickly as we possibly can. It is a fitting tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and the energy and vigour of this Government that, whereas the previous Government talked about the project for months and months, they did absolutely nothing to deliver it, but, in three months, we have delivered it.

Q8. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) was correct to raise the issue of the green belt because a report in *The Sunday Times* at the weekend quoted one of the Prime Minister's Ministers at the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Does the Prime Minister realise that in Gloucestershire such remarks about building on green fields as opposed to brown-field sites will cause great alarm? Does he also agree that, although it may be cheaper and more convenient to build on green-field sites, the long-term costs to future generations would be enormous? [9743]

The Prime Minister: That is precisely why I said to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford that my hon. Friend the Minister was merely setting the same targets as the previous Government had. The policy has not changed in any shape or form. A Green Paper was published in November by the hon. Gentleman's Government, and we are considering the responses to it. There is no intention to cut great swathes through the green belt, as the hon. Gentleman has suggested. We support the idea of the green belt.

Q9. **Mr. Hanson:** Has my right hon. Friend had a chance to see the international crime victimisation report which was published today and which shows that, after

18 years of Conservative Government, Britain has the highest level of car robberies, burglaries and assaults of any of the 11 industrialised nations? Will he confirm to the House what action the new Labour Government intend to take to reduce crime? Will he confirm once and for all that, whatever else it may be, the Conservative party no longer has the right to call itself the party of law and order? [9744]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Conservative party was the party of law and disorder, because crime doubled during the Conservative years. This Government will take action to reduce it, including action on juvenile offending in particular to try to halve the time that it takes to get juvenile offenders to court. We will also take action against anti-social behaviour in our local communities and, later today, we shall announce action on sentencing.

We are taking action on crime; we are being tough on crime, but we are also addressing the causes of crime. That is why the welfare-to-work programme, which will give jobs to young people, and improvements in our education system give us the best chance of creating a decent, civilised society in which we are more likely to breed responsible citizens.

Q10. **Mr. Greenway:** What promise did the Prime Minister make to Mr. Roy Hughes, the former Member for Newport, East to make way for the hon. Gentleman who formerly represented Stratford-on-Avon? According to newspaper reports, Mr. Hughes is attributed as having said that he was offered a peerage. If that comes to light during the next few days, would it not show that, even within a 100 days, his Government are steeped in hypocrisy? [9745]

The Prime Minister: I have no intention of commenting on any peers list—but anyone on it will be there on merit. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth), now a Minister, was selected on one member, one vote—by a rather larger electorate than chose the present Conservative leader.

Mr. Bill Michie: I welcome the steps already taken by the Labour Government in their first few months of power to raise standards and optimism for the future. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need a strong manufacturing base for sustained economic growth?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree entirely. It is of course important for manufacturing and other parts of industry that we achieve stability for the long term. That is precisely why we took the measures in the Budget to curb the deficit; it is also why we have taken action on interest rates, so as to make absolutely sure that we squeeze any inflation out of the system. We must not go back to the time that followed the last Conservative boom. When it went bust, interest rates were at 15 per cent. for a year and mortgage rates were above 15 per cent. for six months or more. I never want to go back to the days of that Tory boom and bust.

Q11. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** Will the Prime Minister perhaps visit Cornwall later this year? If so, I hope that he will not fall ill, because if he does he will find that he is 40 minutes away from an accident and emergency unit—that is the average. He will also find that cottage hospitals across the county are facing permanent closure this winter because of this year's cash shortfalls. Does he agree that it makes no sense to close hospitals now if what he says about increased Government funding next year, and thereafter, is right? [9746]

The Prime Minister: Of course the hon. Gentleman is right to say that many hospitals face a very difficult situation, but as I told the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) earlier, it is important to put the public finances on a stable footing. There is fresh money coming into the national health service, not just next year but this year, at this very moment, as a result of cuts in bureaucracy and other changes. In their Budget submission to us, the Liberal Democrats asked us to put an extra £500 million or £600 million into the NHS: we have put double that amount into it.

Mr. Eric Clarke: Is the Prime Minister aware that the people of Scotland warmly welcome the White Paper on devolution? Does he plan to come to Scotland and spend some time in Midlothian? We would welcome him there to the yes, yes campaign—he would certainly get a yes, yes vote for his visit.

The Prime Minister: I very much look forward to taking part in the campaign for Scottish devolution. It is important that Scotland should have the chance of a greater say in its own affairs. I am delighted, too, that the Conservative party has now said that it will abide by the verdict of the referendums. That gives us the chance to ensure that the people of Scotland and Wales get their say and that we can put the constitution on a proper, secure, modern footing for the 21st century.

Q12. **Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith:** Does the Prime Minister intend to continue appointing Members of this House who represent Scottish constituencies as Ministers with responsibility for English matters? [9747]

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman will know, all Members of the House are treated equally—that is, should be, and will remain, the position. Possibly the most authoritative statement on the subject came from a former Conservative Prime Minister in the early 1960s, when the issue of Stormont was raised. He made it quite clear why all Members of Parliament should be treated equally.

Q13. **Mr. Bennett:** Will the Prime Minister accept the thanks of my constituents for a job well started, and their wish that he should enjoy a well-deserved summer break—*[Interruption.]* Despite the jeers from the Opposition, I am sure that everyone agrees that he ought to enjoy a good summer holiday. When he comes back, however, will he look at the problems that came up at the Earth summit—in particular, the difficulties of persuading the United States and the major oil companies to do something about global warming? Will he also consider the need to agree on effective targets at the Kyoto conference? [9748]

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his good wishes for the holiday and I hope that everyone has a good holiday. It is obviously very important that the Kyoto conference is a success. There is now a better chance of that happening as a result of the UN General Assembly special session. My hon. Friend will know that the European Union has committed itself to very tough targets for the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. I was delighted by the recent speech of President Clinton, which presaged a different attitude on the part of the United States. If it is possible to do so, we should get out of Kyoto a set of binding limits that allow us to take the measures necessary to put our environment on a stable footing for the long term.

Q14. **Mr. Jenkin:** May I ask the Prime Minister to clarify an answer that he gave to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition? Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that it is perfectly all right for a Minister who is a major shareholder in one of our leading energy companies to lead Government policy on gas liberalisation in the European Community, or will he give an undertaking that such obvious conflicts of interest, for as long as the Minister has to hold those shares, will not now take place? [9749]

The Prime Minister: Both the hon. Gentleman and the Leader of the Opposition should have noticed the more serious Members on the Opposition Benches shaking their heads as they were speaking. We are following precisely the procedures that have always been laid down. There is no conflict of interest and my noble Friend has followed precisely the advice of the permanent secretary at the DTI. There has been no impropriety whatever. If there is any evidence of that, let it be produced, but five times his right hon. Friend failed to produce it.

We all know exactly what the game is here. Because, under the previous Government, there were allegations proven of misconduct, the Opposition want to smear the new Government and try to pretend that all politics is the same. Well, all politics is not the same and this Labour Government is not that old Tory Government.

Criminal Justice

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, Madam Speaker, I wish to make a statement about improving the criminal justice system.

This morning, a major survey of crime victimisation in 11 industrialised countries was published. According to that survey, England and Wales top the league for robbery, for assaults, for burglary and for car crime. The results of the survey confirm the degree to which, in this country over the past two decades, crime has become an everyday experience. Yet, while crime has soared, the criminal justice system has become less effective. Over the past 18 years, crime has doubled, but the numbers convicted of those crimes have fallen by a third.

My overriding priority is to secure the safety of the public. The survey published this morning shows how far we have to go to do just that, but we have already embarked on reform of the Crown Prosecution Service and in this Session we will be putting our crime and disorder Bill before Parliament. The Bill will tackle anti-social behaviour, particularly from young offenders, which makes a misery of the lives of so many law-abiding people of our country. Today, I am announcing other steps in the long-overdue process of establishing an effective criminal justice system.

First, there are delays. Delays clog up the system and currently 12,000 prisoners are waiting on remand. When cases take too long to come to trial, taxpayers' money is wasted and the link between crime and punishment is broken. We have to improve the speed and efficiency of the criminal justice system. In particular, we are pledged to halve the time it takes to get persistent young offenders from arrest to sentence.

Very late in the day, the previous Government commissioned a review of delay. When that review, the Narey report, was published in February, I described it as showing the "neglect and complacency" of the then Government

> "in their running of the criminal justice system"—[*Official Report*, 27 February 1997; Vol. 291, c. 433.]

I will act on the Narey report. One of the most striking benefits should come from implementing new arrangements for case preparation that will enable many straightforward guilty plea cases to be disposed of within a day or two of charge. That will help to revive the concept of summary justice on which the magistrates court system was founded—local justice delivered in a quick, fair and straightforward way.

Further details of my response to the Narey report will be given in a written answer to the House today.

To combat further delay, existing custody time limits will be enforced more effectively and we shall set new statutory time limits for the preparation of both adult and young offender cases. I also want to strengthen the ability of magistrates courts to manage cases more effectively.

We shall introduce tougher bail conditions to deter defendants from abusing their bail.

I intend to implement the provisions in the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 under which magistrates will hear an indication of plea before deciding whether a case needs to go to the Crown court. That will enable magistrates to deal quickly with defendants who plead guilty.

Our manifesto promised

> "an effective sentencing system . . . to ensure greater consistency and stricter punishment for serious repeat offenders."

We are therefore proposing that judges in the Court of Appeal should prepare sentencing guidelines for all the main criminal offences.

Prison is necessary for those whose crimes and behaviour require it. Before the end of this year, I will implement section 2 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997, providing automatic life sentences for second-time serious sexual and violent offenders. The crime and disorder Bill will provide for extended supervision of other sexual and violent offenders after their release from prison.

Provisions in the Crime (Sentences) Act setting minimum sentences for persistent burglars and drug dealers were significantly improved by Labour amendments, which will give judges sufficient discretion to avoid injustice. In the light of that, I therefore intend to implement the mandatory minimum seven-year sentence for third-time drug traffickers later this year.

We shall consider implementing the three-year minimum sentence for third-time domestic burglars in the light of resources and the Prison Service's capacity, as the previous Government proposed. The previous Administration's plans meant that this provision was unlikely to have any appreciable effect until some time in 2001.

As promised in our manifesto, courts will be required to explain, when sentencing, what the sentence means in practice. They should state the time to be spent in prison, the period of supervision after release and the period during which the offender might be recalled to prison.

These requirements will allow the victim, the offender and the public to understand the true nature of the sentence. They are superior to the complex provisions in the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997, constructed by the previous Government, which we criticised in opposition and which we do not intend to implement.

On custodial sentences for young offenders, the courts need a more coherent and flexible set of powers to lock up that small group of persistent young offenders who wreak havoc in their communities. As I announced on 3 July, the courts will have available to them from April 1998 the secure training order. We are also proposing to give the youth court the power to order the secure remand of such offenders.

Ninety-four per cent. of convicted offenders are dealt with in the community, and all but a tiny handful of those who are imprisoned return to the community at the end of their sentence. Ensuring the effectiveness of community punishments, and of community supervision for released prisoners, is therefore of the utmost importance.

The courts must have confidence that community punishments are administered correctly. Offenders must receive their punishments in full. If they refuse to comply, they must be brought back to court. Enforcement must improve. The No. 1 priority of the probation service is—and must be—to protect the public.

There should be nothing soft whatever about community punishment. It is absurd that a community penalty requires an offender's consent, and that requirement will be brought to an end.

[Mr. Jack Straw]

I also want to strengthen the credibility of probation supervision. I am looking at a number of issues, including the scope to take away the passports of those on community punishments, making it impossible for them to travel abroad for the duration of their sentence. Recent trials of electronic tagging have proved remarkably successful. In order to build on this, the three pilot areas in Norfolk, Manchester and Berkshire will each be extended to neighbouring counties to cover at least twice the population. I shall also pilot tagging for those on bail as well for fine defaulters, persistent petty offenders and juveniles.

As the whole House knows, there is a clear link between crime, drugs and disorder. Areas with high levels of disorder have four times the level of violent crime as other areas. That is why we shall bring in community safety orders in the crime and disorder Bill to provide tough, effective sanctions against such neighbourhood disorder. Moreover, a new drug testing and treatment order will be a further powerful community punishment to help break the vicious circle of drug dependency and crime.

We are already reviewing the probation service and its relationship to the Prison Service. Those two services should work together more effectively to protect the public through integrated programmes both in prison and in the community. I have also announced a new diploma in probation studies, focusing on the vital role of the probation service in protecting the public and reducing crime. The probation service is a profession in its own right. Probation training should therefore no longer be linked to social work education.

The use of the fine has declined in recent years, despite its good record on discouraging reoffending. Concerns about current enforcement procedures are being addressed by a working group led by the Lord Chancellor's Department. We will consider any changes that might be necessary to ensure that the fine retains its proper place in the courts' sentencing armoury.

We shall also do more to help victims of crime. The Prime Minister announced an extra £1 million a year for Victim Support, making the total £13 million. We are reviewing ways of protecting victims and vulnerable witnesses from defendants who try to bully them into silence.

As I said, the present high levels of crime and disorder will take time to reverse. We are making a start by tackling crime at its roots. We must intervene early to change the behaviour of young offenders. We shall make it clear that the aim of the youth justice system is to protect the public and reduce reoffending. A national network of youth offender teams will implement much tougher regimes of community interventions. A new national board for youth justice will oversee change.

The whole House knows that crime breeds when individuals are left without a stake in society. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's welfare-to-work programme for the young and long-term unemployed should reduce both the temptation and the opportunity for crime. Getting a job is the best thing that any ex-offender can do. I am therefore pleased to announce that all young people leaving prison will have direct access to our new deal for the young unemployed. After an initial gateway period starting immediately they leave prison, during which they will receive intensive job search assistance, ex-offenders will be guaranteed a place on one of the four new deal options.

In the 18 years since 1979, crime has doubled, yet the number of criminals convicted by the courts has dropped by a third. Such a record of failure cannot easily be reversed. This afternoon, however, I have outlined the first steps towards building a criminal justice system which the public have a right to expect—a system that is fair, swift and effective in tackling crime and disorder. I commend the proposals to the House.

Dr. Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): I thank the Home Secretary for his courtesy in letting me have an advance look at his statement. It is a long statement, full of detailed proposals and, in the time available, he will understand if I do not touch on all the points that he raised, not least because I do not want overly to burden the House. I assure him, however, that when he produces a Bill, we shall examine it in great detail.

I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's acceptance of large parts of Conservative Government policy. May I tell him, as he would not have been able to see, that, judging from the expression on the faces of many hon. Members behind him, his proposals will get a warmer reception on the Opposition Benches.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the crime rate rose faster in each decade between the end of the second world war and 1979 than in the past 18 years? Will he publish the appropriate figures? Does he also agree that the crime rate has dropped by 10 per cent. over the past four years, reversing a trend of 40 years under both Governments? Does he recognise that a reduction of about half a million crimes a year means millions fewer victims? Why can he not welcome that?

Is the Secretary of State aware that the last international crime survey in 1992 covering 20 countries found that there was less chance of being murdered or violently or sexually assaulted in Britain than in many other western countries? Why did he not refer to the survey of 18 OECD countries in 1993-95, which showed that England and Wales had the largest fall in recorded crime?

Although I welcome much of what the right hon. Gentleman has announced, is he aware that the public will be disappointed that he is taking such a relaxed and disinterested stance on house burglary? Why does he not recognise that burglary is an invasion of privacy and possessions and frequently a destroyer of peace of mind and quality of life?

Why does the Secretary of State not think that burglars who commit three offences should not be given a minimum sentence of three years, or is his criminal policy simply being dictated by the Treasury? Instead of dithering, reviewing and contemplating, will he now commit to introducing that sensible measure on the sentencing of repeat burglars by 1999, as we were committed to do?

Even on tagging, the right hon. Gentleman equivocates. What has caused him to accept the principle of tagging, when the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), a Front-Bench Labour spokesman on the Criminal Justice Bill, said in Standing Committee A on 18 December 1990:

> "Electronic monitoring is a dangerous and irrelevant concept. It is wrong in principle. . . It has enormous implications for civil liberties"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 18 December 1990; c. 274.]

Given Labour Members' objection "in principle" to tagging, why should the House now believe the Secretary of State's latest plans? Is this just another Labour policy likely to be jettisoned?

Speaking of jettisoning principles, does the right hon. Gentleman recall the Prime Minister describing secure training orders as "a sham"? Whom are we to believe? Who is trying to make the public feel good, without being willing to act in the public interest?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that I welcome his new commitment to tougher sentences for violent and sexual offences? Is he aware that we will also support him as he advances our proposals for repeat drug offenders?

In 1995, the right hon. Gentleman called our proposals

"a bizarre mixture of complacency and desperation".

Is he aware that his hon. Friend the present Minister of State claimed in 1996 that they were "a farce"? Is he also aware that we welcome the Government's conversion to the public interest, which we have long promoted, but that we shall closely monitor his application?

Does the Secretary of State accept that we will support any new, useful attempts to tackle delay, and that it was the previous Government who introduced custody time limits and set up the Narey inquiry, on which he is to act?

Parts of today's statement will give some encouragement to the public. However, does the right hon. Gentleman recognise also that it will be widely welcomed by burglars, from whom a threat has been lifted? Does he realise that he may soon be deemed partially responsible by the victims of burglars, whose experience of that crime the right hon. Gentleman refuses to take seriously?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman shows the same levels of competence in dealing with this statement as he demonstrated as chairman of the Conservative party in taking it to its greatest defeat this century. He talked about the reception given to our proposals. The proposals that I announced today are based on our manifesto, which was overwhelmingly endorsed by the British people—not least because of its law and order measures.

The right hon. Gentleman asked several questions, and I shall do my best to answer them. He made some ridiculous claims about the provisions of section 4 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 relating to repeat burglars. He implied that his Administration were committed to bringing that section into force by October 1999. They did nothing of the kind—indeed, the commitment went backwards.

In April 1996, in the White Paper "Protecting the Public", the Government gave, as "an example" of how their plans might be achieved,

"taking account of . . . the need to provide additional prison places and the resource implications"—

exactly what I said—that the proposals for minimum sentences for domestic burglars might be introduced "in October 1999". However, those provisions would not have had any effect until 2001.

By March 1997, the Government's commitment had been reduced even more. I have the official Home Office press statement that was issued when the Crime (Sentences) Bill received Royal Assent on 21 March 1997. It states:

"Notes for editors. None of the provisions of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 have immediate effect. No dates have yet been set for implementation."

The right hon. Gentleman skips about with a series of figures, trying to suggest that the public's understanding of the record of the previous Administration from 1979 regarding the doubling of crime and the great increase in victimisation is somehow wrong. He reminded me of Pol Pot—trying to set year zero at the date that suited him. I shall be delighted to publish all the figures to which the right hon. Gentleman referred—many are already in the Library, and others I published when I was in opposition.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the OECD report. That report shows that, of 16 western countries, England and Wales had the largest increase in crime between 1987 and 1994. I shall put that report in the Library. There can be no gainsaying the survey published today that shows that the people of England and Wales are more likely to be the victims of burglary, robbery, assault, theft from cars and theft of cars than those in any of the other 11 countries mentioned.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman referred to delays. I am very glad that he approves of our plans to reduce delays in courts. However, he did not acknowledge—and he should—that, despite the fact that the number of people convicted by the courts has fallen by a third in the past 18 years, thanks to the incompetence of the previous Administration, delays have worsened by five weeks. It took nine weeks to get a case to court in 1984, and it now takes 14 weeks. That is scandalous.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Many of us are appalled by the overcrowding in prisons, and are therefore attracted by the arguments of the Offenders Tag Association. Against the background of the very constructive letter written to me on this subject by the Minister responsible for prisons, will my right hon. Friend comment on the view that, in Manchester, Reading and Norfolk, probation service care is received only spasmodically and surreptitiously, and that through-care is important? What is the Government's policy in relation to tagging in the field of back-end release—that is, curtailing the sentences of first-time offenders under the supervision of the night curfew?

Mr. Straw: We have no proposals on my hon. Friend's last point at present, but we are certainly ready to consider proposals.

My hon. Friend asks about the practice of tagging. The analysis of the experiments in the three pilot areas shows that they are 80 per cent. successful and, whatever original concerns there may have been about tagging, there is no question—I am happy to say this—but that they have proved more successful than many expected and can make community punishments much tougher and more effective.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Home Secretary realise that we will welcome measures to reduce the delay in court procedures and to strengthen community sentences, including tagging where that can be part of an effective programme for the offender concerned? But how many additional prison places will be required for the sentencing proposals to which the right hon. Gentleman has committed himself, and do the figures that he will produce assume that one in five criminals will be deterred by the existence of mandatory sentences,

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

given that there is no objective basis for that assumption which has been made by the Home Office since the time of the previous Government?

Is the right hon. Gentleman now beginning to regret joining in the hue and cry for longer prison sentences, which was led by the previous Home Secretary, which was based on no commitment of resources? There were no prison places for all these people and were the 20 new prisons to be built, that would be at the expense of the policing and crime prevention which saves victims from suffering crimes in the first place.

Mr. Straw: The detailed answers to the questions which the right hon. Gentleman asks were given in "The Audit of the Prison Service" and its annexe published last Friday by me and placed in the Library of the House. It contains detailed analysis of the methodology used by the research and statistics section of the Home Office to make its assessment of the rise in the prison population. I speak from memory, but I do not think that he will find included in that the rather arbitrary assumption—he is quite right—that one in five prisoners would somehow be deterred by some of the provisions.

The effects during the next few years of the provisions that I have announced to implement sections 2 and 3 of the Crime (Sentences) Act are limited, because those offenders are likely to expect custodial sentences in any event. The issue is how long those sentences should be and, in respect of serious violent and sexual offenders, if they are released from their life sentence whether they should be subject to life licence.

The right hon. Gentleman makes the general point about the hue and cry in favour of longer prison sentences. I and my party are in favour of the appropriate sentence. We disagreed about this in opposition and we may still disagree, but it is fair and appropriate that if sexual and violent offenders offend a second time, they should be subject to an automatic life sentence, bearing in mind the fact that the tariff will be set by the trial judge and the release date by the Parole Board. For traffickers in class A drugs, a seven-year minimum sentence is, in normal circumstances, appropriate.

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): First, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement and I assure him that Labour Members, and certainly the British people, will receive it with acclamation. Having said that, let me be more specific in my question. Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that his measures to tackle disorder and anti-social crime, especially in industrial areas, will be fairly specific? Can he assure me that his measures will, in the main, resolve most of the torment and misery that have been inflicted on our neighbourhood communities by such crime?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he says. Like him, I believe that the proposals will be widely welcomed throughout the country. While I was making my statement, there was muttering from the Opposition Benches to the effect that all the proposals had been invented by the Conservative party when in government. I wish that they had. Had the Conservative Government accepted our proposals on, for example, youth justice and disorder instead of dismissing them as irrelevant and unnecessary, persistent young offenders would now be dealt with and the misery that our voters suffer in estate after estate would have been ended.

The proposals that we will bring forward in the crime and disorder Bill, in respect of both youth justice and disorder, will be specific, and I am in no doubt that, once they have been brought into force, they will help to relieve the terrible burden that many of our communities now suffer as a result of such disorder.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Does the Home Secretary acknowledge that the fall in crime over four consecutive years is real? If so, will he congratulate the former Home Secretary? If not, will he tell the House what alternative measures he proposes to adopt? I listened carefully to him. Will he confirm that he does not intend to implement our "honesty in sentencing" proposals? If that is so, what will be the effect on the prison population? Will there be a decrease?

Will the Home Secretary give the British people an assurance that the question of resources will not prevent the Government from keeping in prison those whom the courts judge deserve a custodial sentence, regardless of the fact that that may lead to an increase in the numbers in prison? Will he make sure that there is an adequate prison building programme under the private finance initiative to deal with that increase?

Mr. Straw: I am not sure why the right hon. Lady invites me to congratulate her right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on any issue, given that such words of approbation never passed her lips.

I made it clear when the crime figures were published that I was pleased that recorded crime was going down rather than up. However, the previous Government must be judged on their overall record. Year zero was not 1992: it was 1979. The facts are reflected in the defeat that the Conservatives suffered at the election, not least as a result of their complacency on law and order. The public did not believe the complacent words that they heard from Ministers, because they collided with their own, very different, experience.

The right hon. Lady is right that we are not implementing those sections embedded in the Crime (Sentences) Act that deal with the Conservatives' "honesty in sentencing" proposals. I made that clear when we were in opposition. She asked me about the effect on prison numbers. The right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), sitting two along from her, made it clear, as did the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe, that the "honesty in sentencing" proposals were supposed to have a neutral effect on the prison population. They said that in their White Paper, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman said it on Second Reading. Those proposals were so immensely complicated that they had to be changed again and again.

I share the view of the Lord Chief Justice. I made it clear two years ago that the public and victims should be much clearer about the effect of a sentence. That can be done in a much simpler way under the proposals that I have announced.

The right hon. Lady said time and again when she was in government that any public service must be paid for. The Government stand ready to meet the increased demand on prison places. For that reason, I announced last Friday additional spending on the prison population of £43 million, and I have already agreed plans to build two further new prisons, which were in train under the previous Administration.

Ann Keen (Brentford and Isleworth): May I first comment on what the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Dr. Mawhinney) said? My colleagues were quiet while we were listening to the Home Secretary. We do not engage in anti-social behaviour: we are mature Members of Parliament.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the initiative to help young people who leave prison to enter the jobs market, which is crucial to crime prevention. Does the survey refer to confidence in the British police?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her remarks. Indeed, the survey refers to confidence in the British police. Although confidence in the criminal justice system has fallen, confidence in the police remains high, both historically and by international standards.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The House will welcome any effective steps that the Home Secretary takes to reduce the delay in matters coming to trial. Until we see the right hon. Gentleman's response to the Narey report, it will be difficult for us to judge how effective his proposals are likely to be. Does he accept, however, that he could take at least two steps? First, he could appoint more full-time or part-time stipendiary magistrates. Secondly—this was canvassed in the Narey inquiry—he could contemplate a reduction in the number and categories of cases that are tried before a jury in the Crown court.

May I revert to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe)? Does the Home Secretary accept that there will be widespread disappointment about his departure from the proposition that sentences should mean what they say? That is what is meant by the phrase "honesty in sentencing". Is the right hon. Gentleman's objection to that policy one of principle, or is it based on his fear that it will lead to an increase in the prison population for which there is no Treasury cover?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful for what the right hon. and learned Gentleman said about our proposals in respect of delay. He made two suggestions. Increased use of stipendiary magistrates—which was indeed canvassed in the Narey inquiry—is principally a matter for the Lord Chancellor, but we are considering it. The right hon. and learned Gentleman also suggested a reduction in the number and categorisation of cases. That, too, is a sensible proposal, to which we are giving further thought.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman was wrong to suggest that I had said that we were not proceeding with proposals to make sentences mean what they say. One of our objections to the Conservatives' version of honesty in sentencing is that we would have ended up with very confused sentencing. The Conservatives sought to introduce a new system in which two years would mean two years, but—as the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) could tell the House at length—our consideration in Committee established that the reality would be nothing like that. There would be discounts for this, and premiums for that.

It would be a waste of time and effort to introduce such a system; it would be far better to build on the existing system—I believe that the right hon. and learned Gentleman played a part in its introduction when producing the Criminal Justice Act 1991—and say, by way of practice direction, that the courts should spell out exactly what a sentence means. That is what we intend to do.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on his excellent statement. His proposals will be warmly welcomed by the electorate, especially on housing estates that suffer greatly from crime—such as the one in Leicester that he visited recently.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important not just to have more effectiveness and consistency in sentencing, but to monitor that effectiveness and consistency? It is no longer good enough merely to have guidelines; we need to ensure that those guidelines are followed properly.

Mr. Straw: I agree with my hon. Friend and thank him for what he has said. As a great deal of evidence from the Home Office and the Prison Reform Trust showed recently, considerable and rather inexplicable data show substantial inconsistency between courts in respect of similar offences and offenders. That is something which the whole system—including the Home Office—needs to address.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I assure the Home Secretary that I would not dream of comparing him to Pol Pot. Following his performance this afternoon, it would be infinitely more appropriate to compare him to St. Paul on the way to Damascus.

I warmly welcome the bulk of the policies that the Home Secretary has announced and his apparent conversion to policies that my colleagues and I have espoused in the Home Office during the past three years. He said, however, that he was going to implement the important Narey report. Can he tell us whether there are any significant threads in this seamless robe that he intends to unravel—any proposals that he intends not to implement?

Mr. Straw: As far as I know, we are implementing nearly all the Narey report, consistent with what I told the House when the report came before us in February. There is already a detailed answer in the Vote Office—I would detain the House for probably half an hour if I read it out—which gives further information about each recommendation, and I think that it will have the right hon. Gentleman's approval.

Ms Christine Russell (City of Chester): As one who has been a magistrate for the past 17 years, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the measures that he has outlined. I must say that I listened with amazement to what the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Dr. Mawhinney) had to say. From my 17 years personal experience of such service, particularly in youth courts, I

[Ms Christine Russell]

know that the current system is costly and not very effective. More than anything else it is slow. It is not at all unknown for a young offender who has been arrested at Christmas not to arrive in court until the summer holidays. Exactly what measures does my right hon. Friend have in mind for speeding up the system in the youth courts?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her remarks. As she knows, the policies that I have announced were partly informed by an important conference that was held in Chester, in her constituency, last August. At that conference, she and many other colleagues brought to my attention many of the serious defects in the current system of youth justice as it operated under the previous Administration.

Our crime and disorder Bill will contain a series of proposals to speed up the way in which the youth justice and adult justice systems operate. It will do that by setting much clearer and enforceable time limits on the various stages, by implementing the proposals in the Narey report and, for example, in respect of persistent young offenders, by including a definition of such offenders and by ensuring that, having been identified, they are fast-tracked through the courts.

One specific change that we shall make will be to reverse the judgment in R. *v.* Khan, which has the perverse effect of requiring courts to delay proceedings in respect of a case that is ready first in time until all the other cases are ready. That is one of the reasons for the ludicrous situation that the worse the crimes an offender commits and the more often they are committed, the longer it takes to get him or her to court.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): The Home Secretary has rightly said that he is concerned about delays, which are a big problem in our courts. I should like to make four, I hope helpful, suggestions from the point of view of somebody at the sharp end. The Home Secretary will know that I have more criminal judicial experience as a stipendiary and as a recorder than many others.

There are three problems at magistrates court level. The first is the ability of defendants to get more and more adjournments without good reason. The second is the delay involved as a result of introducing the right to advance information and the Crown Prosecution Service not producing it for weeks. The third is that after the mode of trial is determined, the current requirement by the Crown Prosecution Service is for a gap of six weeks before it serves papers. Those three matters need to be looked at.

Finally, the Home Secretary knows, as we all know, that it is ludicrous that some petty theft and petty assault cases are currently going to the Crown court at defendants' election at a cost of £8,000 a day. That clogs up the Crown court system immensely. In addition to what I have said, there is a powerful argument for restricting the right to a Crown court trial and, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) said, for the appointment of many more metropolitan "stipes". There is plenty of research material in the Lord Chancellor's Department, with which I hope the Home Secretary will liaise carefully, to show that "stipes" get through business very quickly. I hope that those suggestions are slightly helpful.

Mr. Straw: They are indeed, and I shall deal briefly with each of them. There has been a substantial increase in the number and average length of adjournments. I think that they have been encouraged by perverse incentives in the legal aid system. It is also noteworthy that stipendiaries deal more briskly with requests for adjournments than some lay magistrates, and I am sure that matter will be taken on board by the Lord Chancellor's Department.

The hon. Gentleman is right about advance disclosure. In my judgment, those rules, too, have sometimes been abused by legally aided solicitors who try to milk the system. There are inefficiencies in the mode of trial system, including some by the Crown Prosecution Service. They are being addressed by the review which my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has established and which is being conducted by Sir Iain Glidewell.

The hon. Gentleman invited me to agree to one of the proposals of the Narey report that was not accepted at the time either by the previous Government or by my party—a proposal for a restriction on the right to elect for trial. My own view, which was also the previous Government's view, was that we should wait to see how the implementation of section 49 of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996, on plea before venue, worked out before revisiting that matter. Two thirds of the transfers of cases from magistrates courts to Crown courts are made not by election but by decision made by magistrates before election.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): May I assure my right hon. Friend that his statement will receive a warm welcome in my constituency, especially in King's Lynn? The remarks made to me since my election lead me to believe that that applies in particular to the clarity that my right hon. Friend brings to his intention to deliver on our promises to tackle the problems of disorder and anti-social behaviour. Can he reassure the House that in doing that, he will take account of the real difficulty in bringing prosecutions and other actions in that connection, because of the major problems involved in persuading witnesses to give evidence when they can so readily be threatened by those among whom they live?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. From what he has told me, I know about the serious problems that exist even in a relatively peaceful town such as King's Lynn. I know that his constituents have encountered those problems and are looking forward to the changes that I have announced today.

Witness intimidation is serious and is getting worse. We shall set up a review to consider changes in the law and in practice to protect witnesses better. My hon. Friend has drawn our attention to a major problem, which we all have to tackle carefully.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): Looking at Government policies as a whole, what would the Home Secretary consider a measure of success in being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime? Would it be fewer people in prison or more people in prison? If more, how many new prisons does the right hon. Gentleman expect to be required for his millennium project?

As for youth sentencing, does the Home Secretary intend to provide more boot camps such as the one in Colchester, bearing in mind the fact that the average cost per inmate per year is £31,500, as opposed to £17,500 in a typical institution? My question is: is it money or is it sentencing that the right hon. Gentleman is after?

Hon. Members: Guilty or not guilty?

Mr. Straw: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, I have to tell him that I do not see issues of law and order in quite such an eccentric way. My purpose, as I told the House earlier, is to secure better safety for the public. It is on that outcome that we shall be judged. The number of people who end up in prison is a function of how many commit crimes and how many are caught, and of entirely independent decisions made by magistrates and judges. I am not arguing with those decisions. I should like a world in which fewer people appeared before the courts who needed to be sent to prison—and I should like to be judged on that, too.

The hon. Gentleman asked for figures. Future projections of the prison population can be found in "The Audit of the Prison Service", which I laid before the House last Friday. I should be happy to send him an autographed copy, if that would assist his reading.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me about the young offenders camp, the military prison at Colchester. As we made clear at the first Question Time that I took, we have accepted the idea that the experiment ought to run for a year. It would be absurd to abandon it halfway through, and would waste money without producing any information. We shall assess it after it has run for a year.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Having in the past few weeks spent an evening on patrol with officers from the Edlington police in Don Valley, I am sure that they will welcome what he has said about consistent sentencing policy and stiff penalties for those who commit second offences of a violent or sexual nature.

What emerged from that evening was the fear among my constituents of people who have stolen from their homes, yet who then come out into the streets and walk around bold as brass, as if they had got away with it. The survey clearly shows a lack of confidence in measures such as community safety orders and other community punishments. In moving towards community punishments, which have a vital role, how can we ensure that victims feel confident that they would be best served if such punishments were imposed?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her remarks. The purpose of community safety orders is to provide swift and effective ways of securing injunctions against those who commit persistent disorder and the kind of intimidation that she describes, who are not dealt with effectively by magistrates or Crown courts at the moment. The establishment of community safety orders, with more intensive policing of the kind she has described and other provisions of the kind I have announced this afternoon—including, for example, parental responsibility orders, which may be attached to community safety orders—should enable law-abiding people and the police to regain control of their areas. Those people who try to wreck the peace and quiet of those areas will be put where they belong if they continue to do so—in prison.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): While joining my right hon. and hon. Friends in welcoming the vast tracts of the Home Secretary's statement which build on the policies implemented by the previous Government, may I urge him a few more feet down the right road? When will he finish his review on mandatory minimum sentences? Will he implement mandatory minimum sentences for repeat burglars? Is he aware that, if he cannot give a completion date for the review, many will regard his tough talk—regrettably—as a mere sham?

Mr. Straw: The position that I have announced today is the same as that announced by the previous Government in their White Paper, presented to the House in April 1996, which said:

> "The Government's objective is to implement the various proposals, taking account of the Parliamentary timetable, the need to provide additional prison places and the resource implications."

It is a question not of a review, but of whether it is appropriate to take action, bearing in mind those considerations.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend realise that, as the fear of crime and of anti-social behaviour is, regrettably, one of the worst problems in this country in the 1990s, his statement will be very much welcomed? He also knows that a large proportion of crime is drug related. How can we find out the true percentage of crimes which are drug related? What steps can we take to tackle the root causes and stop the wide misuse of drugs, which is growing throughout the country?

Mr. Straw: Drugs lie behind a large amount of crime—not just drug crime specifically, but burglary and theft. The Home Office has conducted a study to try to ascertain the precise relationship between drug and alcohol abuse and those who commit crimes. The preliminary results are alarming and will be published in due course. We are taking other active steps to strengthen the arrangements which the previous Government commendably set in place to improve co-ordination in the fight against crime. A UK drug director will shortly be appointed and, as I have announced this afternoon, we intend that a drug treatment and testing order should be available to the courts as a community punishment to take account and make use of mandatory drug testing.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): May I congratulate the Home Secretary on many of his familiar proposals? Could he say more about the removal of passports from young offenders? There can be few things more distressing to victims of crime and others than to read in a newspaper that a young thug or young offender on probation has been taken on safari to Africa or a cruise in Egypt. Taking away his passport would stop such schemes. Will he look also at domestic probation "punishments" with particular reference to an incident in which a lad was taken to Butlin's for two weeks with a probation officer—during which time the young offender was stealing from other residents' chalets?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his approbation of my proposals, which are familiar because

[Mr. Straw]

we made them before the election. The proposals were voted for. It is also familiar that our proposals for youth justice and disorder were dismissed by the Conservative party as unnecessary at the time. I am glad that it has made a Damascene conversion.

As for passports, at the moment, those who are subject to community supervision are not supposed to go abroad except in "exceptional and compassionate circumstances", but I have discovered that there are no arrangements for enforcing that. That is why I have asked for urgent work to be put in hand to ensure that when people are subject to such punishments, they literally cannot go abroad without breaking many other laws.

I entirely share the hon. Member's view about the inappropriateness of sending those who are subject not only to treatment but to punishment on what appears to be a pleasure holiday. Nothing has damaged confidence in community punishments more than that and I want an end to it.

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): I welcome the statement and I know that it will be very much welcomed by my constituents, whom it will show the true determination to act which they believe is long overdue. My experience is that fear of crime is one of the most insidious features of our current daily lives. Many people are kept prisoners in their homes because of it. It is unacceptable that my constituents have to approach me with their fears of constant harassment in their homes, rubbish thrown over the back yard, verbal abuse, shopping bags snatched and, most recently, an elderly gentleman being knocked to the ground and his glasses trodden on.

Does my right hon. Friend feel that we need a comprehensive approach to the conditions in which crime breeds, in an attempt to tackle crime? Is it a comprehensive approach that we need?

Mr. Straw: Yes, it is. My hon. Friend's description of the problems that some of her constituents face underlines the need for a strategy of zero tolerance that tackles disorder as well as crime. A recent Home Office survey showed that, in areas of instability of the sort she described, there is not only more disorder, but a four times greater chance of people being the victims of violent crime. Disorder leads to crime. Both have to be tackled.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): While I welcome much of the Home Secretary's statement—leaving aside his Pauline conversion, which I do not want to go into—to pick up on what has just been said, there appears to be ample evidence that the seeds of delinquency are sown in early childhood. A number of surveys, particularly in the United States, have shown that provision targeted towards those most at risk at a very young age produces substantial knock-on effects 10 years down the road.

The last person to take an interest was the then right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon when he was Home Secretary, but because that subject does not necessarily enjoy immediate electoral appeal, it is often bypassed. I have always been convinced that a twin-track approach on both those problems will be necessary if the causes of crime are to be tackled. I urge the Home Secretary to consider that and, in particular, whether any money can be made available through a Home Office budget as well as through other services to deal with that issue.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right and makes some important remarks. The evidence from the headstart programme analysis in America shows that effective nursery education is better at deterring offending behaviour later in the teenage years than anything else. That is one reason why we are committed to expanding nursery education. I have no doubt about that. He is also right to say that it is inevitable, perhaps, that Governments of both persuasions have had to go for more short-term solutions because there is a problem of juvenile crime there now that we have to deal with, but I accept what he says.

As for money, that would fall to the Department of Education and Employment and I regret to tell him that, since we are following the previous Administration's public expenditure survey control levels for the next two years, there is no money available for that project.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I think that it was the chief constable of Cornwall who said, "If you cure the drug problem, you can halve your crime problem." I am interested in the introduction of the seven-year sentence, but it is the drug traffickers who worry me. Drug dealers will certainly always take the chance of seven years, and the traffickers, who will put up the price, will make them do it even more. I am worried about the trafficking side in the light of my right hon. Friend's statement. Has he anything to say about that?

Mr. Straw: Drug traffickers are among the most evil people in our society. As I have seen as Home Secretary in the past three months, their ruthless ability to break every law in the land, intimidate and commit acts of violence in pursuit of their trade has no limits. It is appalling and such people need the most severe punishment. I can reassure my hon. Friend that the seven-year sentence that I announced today, which will be implemented later this year, is a minimum. The maximum for drug trafficking is, I believe, life.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): Will the Home Secretary go slightly further than he did in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) in respect of prison places? I ask not least because Lewes prison is in my constituency. I hope that, in the new spirit of co-operation between our parties, he will be able to respond positively. How many new prison places will be required as a consequence of his statement this afternoon? Is the £43 million to deal with existing overcrowding or is it intended also to cover the consequences of the statement?

It is absolutely right that criminals who need to be locked up to protect the public should be in prison, but what steps is the Home Secretary taking to ensure that those who should not be in prison—fine defaulters, for example—are released into the community, providing space for those who should be there?

Mr. Straw: The £43 million that I announced last Friday is to deal with existing overcrowding. We hope that the proposals that I have announced today will come into force quickly, but that will not happen in the next few months, which is the time that that money is intended to cover.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the effect of my proposals on prison places. All the detail is in "The Audit of Prison Service Resources", which was published last Friday. I thought it right to publish it well in advance of this statement so that right hon. and hon. Members would have time to study it beforehand. From recollection, the prison population is estimated to rise to about 68,000—an extra 6,000 places—by early 1999. I should be happy to send the hon. Gentleman a copy of the audit.

The previous Government did a great deal of effective work in reducing the number of fine defaulters who were detained in prison, and we supported them in that. In any one day, there are now usually fewer than 100 prisoners who are there for fine default. I should like to put in place other measures for fine defaulters that we supported in the previous Parliament, but it must also be acknowledged that if people carry on defaulting, they will have to be sent to prison, because there is no ultimate alternative.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Obviously, justice hinges on catching criminals and convicting them, and a critical issue, as my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) said, is that of obtaining witnesses and ensuring that they feel secure in giving evidence.

To do that, we must ensure that court facilities are appropriate, so that, for example, witnesses can be separated from offenders and their friends; that is a problem in Derby, and I should welcome my right hon. Friend's comments on it. Local justice is also important. Having to travel significant distances to court at inconvenient times of day is a disincentive to witnesses.

A critical issue in Derbyshire is the inequity of resources between it and the neighbouring constabularies. In Derbyshire, 20 per cent. more people have to be covered by a typical officer than in neighbouring counties.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the problem of witness intimidation. All Crown courts are now covered by witness services, but many magistrates courts are not. Some magistrates courts are, however, taking steps properly to separate prosecution from defence witnesses. For example, at Redditch there is a locally funded witness service that has been doing effective work. I hope that that example can be followed elsewhere.

The police grant is a new, mystical science which produces winners and losers. It is probably a better way of allocating resources than the system that went before, but, since resources are limited and will remain so under this Administration, for every winner under the police grant system there will be some losers, and I cannot but apologise for that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Order. We must now bring the statement to a close.

Points of Order

4.34 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It relates to the Home Office and the Home Secretary. Have you had any application from a Home Office Minister to make a statement to the House about the crisis that could arise if hundreds of Somalis arrive by Eurostar at Waterloo claiming asylum? Many of them are bogus and have come from safe third countries. I understand that all are entitled to full benefits. They may continue arriving throughout the summer recess. Has any Minister suggested that the Government propose to take any action?

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed that a Home Office Minister, or any Minister, seeks to make a statement on that matter today.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Following my question yesterday, I have taken advice. Has the Minister of Transport asked you to allow him to come to the Dispatch Box to correct an inaccuracy at Question Time yesterday? I pointed out to him that unilateral action to ban bull bars would be illegal under European Union law. The Minister replied that it would not. It has since come to my attention that that is inaccurate, and that such action would be illegal under EU law. The Minister has, albeit inadvertently, misled the House. He should come to the Dispatch Box immediately to correct the inaccuracy.

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Lady knows, I am not responsible for comments that Ministers make or policy commitments that they give. The hon. Lady is making not a point of order but a challenge to the Minister of Transport. She must find means other than points of order by which to pursue the matter with the Minister. Perhaps those on the Government Front Bench will make the Minister of Transport aware of the hon. Lady's comments today.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I do not usually take further points of order. I know that the hon. Gentleman is interested in bull bars, but I will not allow a debate on them. I have answered the hon. Lady's point of order, which was reasonable.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Has the Secretary of State for Wales said that he would like to come to the House to make a statement, following the announcement by Roy Hughes yesterday that he was to be elevated to the House of Lords, and the article in the *Western Mail* which states that the hon. Member for Ogmore (Sir R. Powell) has repeated the allegation that he was offered a peerage to vacate his seat to make way for one of the Prime Minister's loyal supporters? That statement was then refuted by the Secretary of State for Wales. Both of them cannot be telling the truth. Has the Secretary of State asked to come to the Dispatch Box to clarify the situation?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Is the Minister seeking to make a further point of order before I respond?

Mr. Hain: Yes. May I suggest that this is yet another bogus and false point of order from the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans).

Madam Speaker: I have not been told that a Minister seeks to make a statement, but it seems to me that I ought to make a statement and say that it is almost bucket and spade time for the House.

Companies (Political Funds)

4.37 pm

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require ballots of shareholders of companies incorporated under the Companies Act 1985 in respect of proposed donations for political purposes; to define political purposes; to require political funds to be established for the payment of such donations; to specify how such political funds will be funded and the qualifications for receipt of donations; and for connected purposes.

Before we move on to our buckets and spades, I should like to move this motion.

The purpose of the Bill is to correct an anomaly in company law that has existed for far too long. The Bill contains four main provisions. First, it requires publicly quoted companies incorporated under the Companies Act 1985 to establish, after approval has been sought by a ballot of shareholders, separate political funds, should that company wish to make donations for political purposes.

Secondly, the Bill clearly defines political purposes as payments to any political party or any organisation that engages in promoting or campaigning for political parties. Thirdly, it defines a percentage of dividends payable to shareholders that can be put into a company political fund. Most important, it provides the facility for those shareholders who object to payment of part of their dividend into the company political fund to have the right not to contribute, and to receive the full value of their dividend payment.

Under the Companies Act 1985, directors must state in their annual report contributions of more than £200 made for political purposes. The report, together with the company's accounts, is laid before the shareholders at the annual meeting, and approved or rejected in its totality. If, however, any shareholder or group of shareholders wish to object to payments made by the company for political purposes, they have no option but to vote against the resolution to approve the report and accounts of the company.

Shareholders are therefore placed in an extremely difficult position should they disapprove of any payments made for political purposes by that company. Were they to reject the director's report and accounts, that would amount to a rejection of the commercial management of the company. If that company were listed, such action would result in a catastrophic fall in the company's share price, and could have serious commercial repercussions.

No shareholder who invests his money in a company for commercial reasons would wish to precipitate such a situation. Under current law, the shareholder would have little alternative but to act in that way if he profoundly disagreed with donations made by the company for political purposes.

Under current law, a dissatisfied shareholder could move a resolution at the company's annual meeting to censure the board for making any political donation. Such a course of action is costly and administratively difficult. For example, the resolution would have to be circulated to all shareholders, and the company could require the proposers of it to pay for the cost of circulating it. For that and other administrative reasons, shareholder resolutions are seldom submitted at annual meetings.

The purpose of the Bill is to rectify that anomaly by obliging companies that wish to make donations for political purposes to establish a political fund that is entirely separate from the commercial activities and accounts of the company. Shareholders will know how much of each dividend is paid into the company's political fund and what payments are made from the fund, and, if they wished, they would have the right to opt out from contributing part of their dividend payments to such a fund.

The central issue behind the Bill is the extension of shareholder democracy. After the privatisations and building society flotations, there are now between 16 million and 18 million individual shareholders in the United Kingdom. Not only are they shareholders: they are stakeholders in our economy. Those shareholders have the right to a say about how their money is spent if it is spent for purposes other than those for which it was invested, and spent on causes to which they may be deeply opposed.

Without express separate shareholder approval, boards of directors should not spend shareholders' moneys on non-commercial purposes. As I said, the Bill is about the extension of shareholder democracy. It is needed because the current situation is wholly inadequate as the means of protecting shareholders' rights.

The question of political donations has moved high up the political agenda. I welcome the fact that the Government are committed to introducing a policy of transparency, and not before time. They are committed to dealing with donations from foreign sources. I commend the new leader of the Conservative party for announcing that his party will no longer accept foreign donations, such as those made by Mr. Asil Nadir.

It is time that publicly quoted companies operated according to clearly defined criteria which uphold the rights of their shareholders. Since 1967, companies have been obliged to disclose in their annual reports any gifts of moneys above £200 for political purposes. There has been no obligation on companies, however, to seek the prior approval of shareholders for such donations.

Between 1980 and 1991, 66 of the largest companies in the United Kingdom made political donations which totalled £13.6 million. I make no comment on the fact that 85 industrialists connected with those 66 companies received peerages or knighthoods during the same period.

I welcome the fact that a number of companies have of late decided to end their practice of making political donations. The fact remains, however, that, according to a limited survey of the top 300 United Kingdom companies, in 1995-96 more than £1.5 million was paid out by such companies for political purposes. The vast majority of those moneys were paid away with little or no regard to the wishes of individual shareholders.

My Bill would enhance the rights of millions of shareholders by allowing them to determine whether the companies in which they invest their money should be allowed to use part of their profits to engage in political activities. It would not deny any company the right to make a political donation, providing it has established a political fund with the approval of its shareholders. The Bill will enhance shareholder democracy, and as such I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Roger Godsiff, Mr. Charles Clarke, Mr. Harry Cohen, Caroline Flint, Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, Mr. Marsha Singh, Mr. Denis MacShane, Mr. Phil Woolas, Ms Margaret Moran, Mr. Alan Keen.

COMPANIES (POLITICAL FUNDS)

Mr. Roger Godsiff accordingly presented a Bill to require ballots of shareholders of companies incorporated under the Companies Act 1985 in respect of proposed donations for political purposes; to define political purposes; to require political funds to be established for the payment of such donations; to specify how such political funds will be funded and the qualifications for receipt of donations; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 November, and to be printed [Bill 60].

Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill [*Money*] (No. 2)

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Resolution of the House of 22nd May 1997 relating to Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill [Money] shall have effect as if—

> (1) in paragraph (1), the words 'an Order in Council under' were omitted,
>
> (2) in paragraph (2), for the words 'the Secretary of State' there were substituted the words 'a Minister of the Crown', and
>
> (3) in paragraph (2)(b), the words 'the establishment of' were omitted.—*[Mr. Jon Owen Jones.]*

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker—or rather, two points of order. The motion refers to a resolution of the house of 22 May 1997; we are being asked, in effect, to amend it. I have been to the Vote Office and asked for a copy of that previous resolution, and I have in my hand the only copy in its possession. In other words, any other hon. Member who goes there for a copy will be referred to me, which is hard luck. I put it to you that when we are asked to look at former resolutions, the Government should ensure an adequate supply of the relevant documents in the Vote Office.

My second and different point relates to the meaning to be attached to the phrase:

"a Minister of the Crown".

I assume that it embraces all Secretaries of State, Ministers of State and Under-Secretaries, but I would appreciate your guidance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): On the first point, the resolution should have appeared in *Hansard* and is thus freely available to all right hon. and hon. Members. The second point is one for debate, not for the Chair. We now have some time—admittedly limited—to debate the motion.

Mr. Hogg: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not want to be tiresome, but the meaning of a phrase is a matter not for Ministers but for the Chair—this is a House document. I am only asking what "Minister of the Crown" means.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We are debating a Government motion, so the Chair should not rule on it. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may have a chance to catch my eye during the debate if he wants to expand on his point.

4.48 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I should like to ask a few questions about the motion because, although it is a money resolution, it deals with certain aspects of the Bill which, because of the previous timetable motion, were not discussed, and certain significant points must be clarified at this stage. It seems slightly odd, although I am told that it is the way in which the House proceeds, that we are dealing with amendments that are consequential upon amendments that we shall not be discussing, if we get there, until the end of our debates on the Lords amendments. It is, however, relevant to raise these questions now.

The first question relates to the matter raised by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) in his point of order, which is the definition of:

"a Minister of the Crown".

If I read the amendments right, a Minister of the Crown will now be entitled to spend money, which previously had been the purview of the Secretary of State. It is for the consideration of the House as to which Ministers will be entitled to spend money on matters such as those set out in the resolution:

"(a) in connection with the referendum held by virtue of the Act, or

(b) in the preparation of a Scottish Parliament or a Welsh Assembly."

I presume that not every Minister in the Government would be entitled to spend public money and then claim that it somehow fitted under one of those two heads; I should be grateful if we could be told who those Ministers will be.

Are there any limits to how much those Ministers might be able to spend under the provision? Can any Minister of the Crown issue, for example, expenditure certificates in connection with the forthcoming referendums? Who, at the end of the day, judges whether the expenditure is actually in connection with the provided purposes? Who is the arbiter of that expenditure and how will the system work? When expenditure was carried out by Secretaries of State, it obviously related to the Scottish Office or the Welsh Office and that was not a problem; but if it is spread much wider, we need to know who the Ministers are and what the limitations are.

Secondly, the deletion of the words "the establishment of", is another of the consequential amendments. I have read the explanation for that action given in another place and I understand that it is to allow for certain preparations that might not be strictly connected with the establishment of a Parliament building or a place for the Assembly, or for expenditure on matters such as preparing for the tax-varying powers of the Scottish Parliament. I heard what was said in the other place, and we all appreciate that some expenditure might go a little wider, but we need to know how wide. We are told that it is likely to be expenditure incurred by the Inland Revenue or the Department of Social Security, but within what time scale are they to be allowed to make that expenditure? What sort of sums are envisaged—large or small?

If the tax-varying powers are wider than they appear to be on the face of the Scottish White Paper, what control will there be over the expenditure? If other potential tax-raising powers are hidden within the words of the White Paper, can studies into those be contracted, which would be paid for under this provision of the money resolution? What limits would there be to that sort of work? Those are points on which we need to have information before the House can be satisfied that the matter has been fully thought through.

Finally, there is the question of the words that are not subject to the amendments, but which are within the resolution and closely tied to the amendments—the words, "provided by Parliament". What the money resolution says is that the expenditure, which can now be incurred by any Minister of the Crown in connection with a widely drawn preparation for a Scottish Parliament or a Welsh Assembly, will be provided for by Parliament. What does that mean? Will the money come from the central Exchequer? Will it come from the Scottish and the Welsh blocks? If from the Scottish and Welsh blocks, will the blocks be as they are now, or will they be supplemented to pay for the expenditure?

What new calculations have the Government made of the preparation costs? In respect of the Scottish Parliament, we have had start-up figures of between £10 million and £14 million, but that was in the days before the powers were expanded as they have been in the money resolution. Presumably, those figures will now be greater. We should be told what estimate the Government make of the extra costs of preparing for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly under the broader criteria.

We need assurances, not only about what the costs will be, but especially that none of the expenditure will be paid for by United Kingdom taxpayers. If the expenditure has to be incurred—the House knows that I would disagree with that suggestion—it should be paid for by people in Wales and in Scotland, and I should like a categorical assurance on that point.

4.54 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I believe that it is reasonable to take the time of the House to ask a question about borrowing powers. I should have thought that any Parliament that calls itself a Parliament must be entitled to borrowing powers, and there are no limits, beyond those of what is politically acceptable, to the borrowing powers of the United Kingdom Government.

By contrast, there are very precise limits to the permissible borrowing of local authorities. Before their borrowing is included in calculations of the public sector borrowing requirement, it is ultimately controlled by the Treasury. It is inconceivable that similar restraints will not be imposed on a Scottish Parliament as, whether it has taxing powers or not, nearly all its revenue will come from Westminster, having been calculated as a share of the UK Government's revenue. Any borrowing that it is permitted will be part of the PSBR and controlled accordingly.

Is that a correct understanding of the position? Some people have great expectations of a Parliament in Edinburgh that has borrowing powers. Might that be clarified?

4.56 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I should like to follow the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). I draw the Minister's attention to three points and seek his clarification on them.

The first point relates to the requirement for an Order in Council under the Act. That is the first tiret. As I understand the existing money resolution, before an expenditure is authorised to be covered under the money resolution, the money must be authorised under the Act and approved by an Order in Council. In other words, the Order in Council was a condition precedent of the money being paid.

We are deleting that. In other words, I would suggest to the House, we are loosening the control that the House has of the money that is covered by the money resolution. In other words, expenditure can be incurred under the Act which is not covered by an Order in Council, and that is a wider class of money than would otherwise have been the case.

When the money resolution was first brought before the House, the Minister obviously had in mind a range of expenditure with, no doubt, a quantum attached to it. He has removed the condition precedent. That suggests to me a wider range of payments, and no doubt an increased quantum. What are the new categories that were not previously in his mind, and how much more shall we be asked to pay?

My second point relates to the matter that I raised with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a point of order. I believe that the House is interested to know the meaning of the phrase, "Minister of the Crown". I well know the meaning of the phrase, "Secretary of State"—not just one, but any old Secretary of State—but what is the meaning of the phrase, "Minister of the Crown"? I assume that it includes a Secretary of State. I assume, too, that it includes a Minister of State. I suppose that it includes an Under-Secretary. However, the House is entitled to know what it means.

I suspect that the phrase means that any old Minister can give the authority; if that is right, we are diluting the authority of the Secretary of State or, more specifically, removing his accountability. Under the previous money resolution, only the Secretary of State could give the authority, but now any old Minister can do so; the Secretary of State can slough off responsibility by saying that something was said by his Under-Secretary and he did not really mean it.

That brings me to the final point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes, that we are removing the linkage in the second tiret, subsection (b), to "the establishment of" a Scottish Parliament. When the money resolution was first before the House, it was fairly plain that it covered only expenditure linked to purposes

> "for the establishment of a Scottish Parliament".

In a sense, one knew what that meant. The resolution was fairly limited; there is the establishment of a Scottish Parliament and thus consequential expenditures flowing therefrom. If we remove the phrase, "the establishment of", the resolution will read:

> "in preparation for a Scottish Parliament".

That is a very large slice of the cake of expenditure—a whole range of consequential expenditures in Scotland and Wales may be deemed necessary as a Scottish Parliament or Welsh Assembly is about to be set up. No doubt the Inland Revenue, the Department of Social Security, my old Department, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and many other Departments will say that, because a Scottish Parliament or a Welsh Assembly is about to be set up, further expenditure will be required.

The House is entitled to know the new classes of expenditure that are now covered by the money resolution. I should be pleased to hear from the Minister his assessment of the increase in that expenditure. He no doubt has some figure in mind. We want to know what his previous assessment was and the assessment that he now makes of the increase. Both figures would be extremely helpful.

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

A lot more work remains to be done by the Minister to persuade the House about the desirability of the money resolution before hon. Members give their consent.

5.1 pm

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office (Mr. Henry McLeish): I should be pleased to answer some of the questions put by Opposition Members and by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). It is important to clear up first the question about Ministers of the Crown. The meaning will be wider than Secretary of State, because there may be expenditure by Departments not headed by a Secretary of State, for example, expenditure by the Inland Revenue on computer programmes to deal with tax issues. Much of the interpretation is common sense, but it seems to be lost on some Opposition Members.

The question of junior Ministers was also raised. Clearly, that is a red herring. In this respect, as in all others, junior Ministers take decisions only on matters referred to them by the Minister in charge of their Department. I should have expected that the experience of some Opposition Members would brush off on them to the point that they would understand what is going on.

We also heard some comments about the costs involved. The total estimated preparatory costs are £18 million to £25 million, as set out in the explanatory and financial memorandum. The money resolution does not change the facts laid before the House and discussed in the other place, which are now back in this House for discussion. DSS costs are included within that limit. All that will be conditional on the Supply process of dealing with money in this House. That, too, is well known to Opposition Members.

Mr. Ancram: It would be much more helpful if the Minister did not simply refer us to the ordinary ways in which that is done, but categorically answered the question about whether any of that expenditure will be paid from sources outwith the Scottish and Welsh blocks and whether any expenditure will be incurred by United Kingdom taxpayers rather than borne by the blocks in Scotland and Wales.

Mr. McLeish: The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) goes over old ground time and again. The answer is obvious: this settlement seeks to strike a balance in terms of Scots seeking to have a Parliament in Edinburgh. The Secretary of State is on record as saying that the costs of that will be borne by the block.

Mr. Hogg: And in Wales?

Mr. McLeish: I am speaking about Scotland. Opposition Members should contain themselves. They ask questions, but they fail to give me an opportunity to respond. I have often told them that listening would be in their long-term interests, instead of carrying on as they have for the past 18 years. With great courtesy, I say that we can see where that has got them.

I shall deal with the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow. Paragraph 7.10 on page 23 of the White Paper states:

> "The Scottish Parliament will have power to authorise the Scottish Executive to undertake short-term borrowing to assist in the short-term matching of income and expenditure. It will not have a long-term borrowing power on its own account."

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Can the Minister clarify his previous answer? If, for example, the Inland Revenue incurs additional expense while setting up the tartan tax, will it be recompensed from the Scottish block?

Mr. McLeish: The answer is self-evident. Labour Members do not call it the tartan tax. The Scots will be given the opportunity in the referendum on 11 September to choose whether the Parliament should have a tax-varying power. Of course, if costs are incurred via the Departments, they will come from the Scottish block. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) asks from a sedentary position why I did not say that. It has been said time and again. The questions have been posed before and answered reasonably.

Mr. Hogg: The Minister referred to the Scottish block, and I understand why he is speaking about that. The principle also applies to the Welsh block. The House wants to know whether what is true of the Scottish block is also true of the Welsh block—in other words, whether any expenditure in Wales that is authorised directly or indirectly under the money resolution will fall on the Welsh block and not be paid by taxpayers outside Wales.

Mr. McLeish: The answer is yes, but the debate should be conducted in a more dignified manner. The Opposition would have us believe that the settlement is not in the interests of the United Kingdom. They take a mean-spirited view and discuss the issues in terms of the UK *v.* Wales, and the UK *v.* Scotland. The country does not want that level of debate. It wants to probe hard on questions of finance, but, after 18 years of the Conservative Government's financial controls, we will not take lectures from the Opposition Front Bench.

The amendments to the money resolution are required in consequence of two sets of amendments made to the Bill in another place. Both are purely technical.

The first amendment is required to take account of the incorporation of the detailed provision for the conduct of the referendum as a schedule to the Bill. Hon. Members will recall that, during the earlier stages of the Bill, we proposed that that should be dealt with by Orders in Council, as had been the case in previous referendums. At the request of Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish in another place, we agreed that the change should be made. That will have the fortunate consequence of allowing the House and another place to rise this week, rather than having to wait simply to debate the Orders in Council. The amendment to the money resolution is purely technical.

The second and third amendments are also technical, and mirror amendments made in another place to clarify the scope of the finance provision in clause 5. Clause 5(2) allows expenditure in preparation for the establishment of a Scottish Parliament or Welsh Assembly to be paid out of money provided by Parliament. The intention is that that provision should cover not only expenditure on the building or refurbishment of Parliament and Assembly buildings, but advance expenditure on, for example, any adjustment to Inland Revenue and DSS computer systems required to cope with the tax-varying powers of the Scottish Parliament.

Such changes have a long lead time and, if the tax-varying powers are to be available upon the establishment of the Scottish Parliament—whether or not the Parliament decides to use them—it may be necessary to incur expenditure before the main devolution legislation reaches the statute book. The amendments are intended to put beyond any doubt the question whether such expenditure would be covered by clause 5. The estimated costs shown in the explanatory and financial memorandum remain unchanged. All expenditure under the provision will be subject to the normal parliamentary rules of Supply.

Question put and agreed to.

Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill (Supplemental Allocation of Time)

5.9 pm

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office (Mr. Henry McLeish): I beg to move,

That the Order of the House of 3rd June 1997 be supplemented as follows:

Lords Amendments

1.—(1) Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at this day's sitting and, if not previously concluded, shall be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of the proceedings on this Order.

(2) For the purpose of bringing proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with sub-paragraph (1)—

(a) the Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and has not yet been decided and, if that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment, shall then put forthwith the Question on any further Amendment of the Lords Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown and on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth agree or disagree with the Lords in the Lords Amendment or, as the case may be, in the Lords Amendment as amended;

(b) the Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining Lords Amendments as appear to the Speaker to involve questions of Privilege and shall—

(i) put forthwith the Question on any Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment and then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth agree or disagree with the Lords in their Amendment or, as the case may be, in their Amendment as amended;

(ii) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in a Lords Amendment;

(iii) put forthwith with respect to the Amendments designated by the Speaker which have not been disposed of the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the Amendments; and

(iv) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments;

(c) as soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments the Speaker shall put forthwith a separate Question on any other Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown relevant to the Lords Amendment.

Stages subsequent to first Consideration of Lords Amendments

2.—(1) The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

(2) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

(3) For the purpose of bringing those proceedings to a conclusion—

(a) the Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and has not yet been decided, and shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) the Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining items in the Lords Message as appear to the Speaker to involve questions of Privilege and shall—

(i) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on any item;

(ii) in the case of each remaining item designated by the Speaker, put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in their Proposal; and

(iii) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Proposals.

Reasons Committee

3.—(1) The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the appointment of its Chairman.

(2) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

Extra time, &c.

4.—(1) This paragraph applies to—

(a) proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments,

(b) proceedings on any further Message from the Lords,

(c) proceedings on the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and on the appointment of its Chairman.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings to which this paragraph applies.

(3) Proceedings to which this paragraph applies shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(4) No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings to which this paragraph applies shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown; and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(5) If proceedings to which this paragraph applies are interrupted by a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on the Motion shall be added to the period at the end of which the interrupted proceedings are to be brought to a conclusion.

(6) If the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the expiry of the period at the end of which proceedings to which this paragraph applies are to be brought to a conclusion, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

The purpose of the motion is to ensure proper, structured consideration of the amendments made to the Bill in another place. The intention is to ensure that the changes proposed to the Bill are given fair consideration and that other business is not jeopardised, particularly at this stage in the Session.

We repeat that the referendums Bill is simple and straightforward and follows precedent. It essentially seeks the consent of the people of Scotland and Wales and paves the way for substantive legislation. The Bill itself has been debated extensively in both Houses. In the Commons, it was debated for almost 22 hours over four days. In the Lords, it was debated for almost 33 hours over six days. Government amendments to the Bill are essentially technical, in that they put on the face of the Bill the provisions that were previously in the Standing Orders. That move was proposed by the Opposition in another place and was accepted by the Government. The other Government amendment simply clarifies the scope of financial provision—it does not imply any additional expenditure over and above what was already anticipated. Opposition amendments are also straightforward. One seeks to require the referendums to be held on the same day. The Government have made it clear all along that there are good reasons for holding the Welsh and Scottish referendums on different days. Another Opposition amendment inserts the word "income" into the second question on the ballot paper. Again, we have always made it clear that that is both unnecessary and undesirable.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The Minister mentioned the argument about the dates of the two referendums and he said that the Government had given reasons for their position both here and in another place. Will he develop those arguments later today, or is this the only occasion upon which he will condescend to address the House on that matter?

Mr. McLeish: I hope that my contributions to the House could never be described as condescending. The Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), will deal with that matter later.

We have no doubt that the Opposition intend to debate the issues sensibly. However, our experience in Committee, when Opposition Members tabled several frivolous amendments, has made the Government wary and not prepared to take any chances. The timetable motion aims to strike the right balance between the need to complete the business and the need to provide adequate time for debate. Time taken debating the allocation of time motion could be used to debate Lords amendments. This seems to be a straightforward and sensible measure, and I therefore urge hon. Members to move on quickly to debate the substantive issues.

5.12 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I have heard some introductions to guillotine motions, but the Minister's comments take the biscuit for their breathtaking arrogance. I shall explain why. The motion is another step along the disgraceful path of railroading this important constitutional legislation through the House. Only yesterday, the Government were still amending the Bill in the House of Lords. I shall turn to today's events later.

The Minister asked whether I intended to take up time debating the motion. I shall take as little time as I can, despite my genuine anger about this imposition. I am in a quandary, as we have only three hours in which to consider the Bill and that time started when the Minister got to his feet. Every moment we spend debating the motion is a minute subtracted from the time that we have to discuss the very important amendments.

If we were to call a Division, that time would also be subtracted from the time that we need to debate those amendments. Therefore, I do not intend either to speak for long or to divide the House. However, we must do justice to the amendments today, as we were not able even to discuss them when the Bill was before the House previously, because of the guillotine imposed at that time. It would constitute a double gag if we did not discuss the amendments today, and that is totally unacceptable in this Parliament.

The shortness of my speech does not detract from my concern about the arrogance with which the Government treat the House of Commons and the synthetic and pathetic display of irritation that they evinced against the other place. The Minister cannot argue that the motion is designed to prevent delay. He said that it is intended to ensure that "other business is not jeopardised". Let us look at the provisions of the motion. They will end consideration of the Bill in three hours. There is no other business on the Order Paper today and, as a result of the motion, we shall rise before the normal Adjournment of the House. Therefore, it is simply wrong to suggest that the motion is necessary in order to protect other business.

Still more breathtaking is the fact that, far from dealing only with Opposition amendments from another place, the Government are amending their own amendments. In the first block of amendments, the Government disagree with the Lords amendments that they passed in another place. As I have said, it is breathtakingly arrogant to suggest that the debate on the motion is somehow a waste of time. The Government are drafting the Bill on the hoof in their headlong rush to produce it.

The Government expressed irritation with the other place when the amendments were passed—I think that all hon. Members will remember the Minister's comments about hereditary peers misusing or abusing their position. It is interesting to examine the facts surrounding those votes in another place. For the first amendment on 3 July concerning the referendum dates, the Opposition in the House of Lords had a majority of seven. Some 49 Labour life peers did not participate in that vote. Where were they? For the second amendment on 21 July, the Opposition had a majority of 17. Some 32 Labour life peers did not vote that day.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman has the figures available, but will he tell the House what percentage of members of the House of Lords voted in those Divisions? That will give us an idea of the importance that the other place attached to the amendments.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman knows that it is for Governments to get their business through. On that occasion, Labour life peers—who, we are told, are sent to the House of Lords to do a job for their party—were simply not present. It is not surprising that Labour Members of Parliament appear so willing to relinquish their seats in this place in order to move to the House of Lords, as they obviously have a pretty cushy role there—they do not even have to turn up to vote.

Mr. Garnier: Labour life peers might have been absent for those votes because the referendum dates—whether they are a week or a month apart—are not part of the Labour party's election manifesto.

Mr. Ancram: That may be so. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) will have more to say about that when we discuss the relevant amendments.

It is quite extraordinary that tonight—the night before we debate the Scottish White Paper—hon. Members will be sent home before the normal Adjournment of the House. I cannot help feeling that the Government are ensuring that English comrades are out of the way before the White Paper is debated tomorrow. The Government do not want them to see the impact that the White Paper's proposals will have on the constitutional position of England and on English Members of Parliament.

The guillotine procedure is never welcome: it is the exercising of Executive power, backed by a parliamentary majority, over the rights of Parliament to discuss and debate substantive and important legislation. It is particularly abusive today as it is based on nothing more than administrative convenience. It demonstrates the Labour Government's total disregard of parliamentary democracy, and it is another step down a dangerous road of which all who cherish the rights of Parliament should be very wary indeed. If it were not for the fact that dividing the House would increase the gag on debate, I would oppose the motion.

However, we must discuss important amendments that we were prevented from considering when the Bill was before the House previously. Therefore, reluctantly and regretfully, I must urge my hon. Friends to proceed to consideration of the amendments from another place as soon as possible.

5.18 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As the Lords amendments relate to tax, it may be convenient for the House if I were to assist it and clarify the position by asking three precise questions.

First, are we correct in understanding that a single person who earns £30,145 a year would be required to pay an extra £660 in taxation if a Scottish Parliament were to raise the basic rate of income tax by 3p in the pound? That would be an 11 per cent. increase in that person's income tax bill. Do the Government expect companies to compensate their employees for that large increase, thereby increasing inflation and making Scottish business less competitive?

My second question refers to the White Paper, which projects that a 3p in the pound increase in the basic rate of income tax will produce £450 million of extra revenue. Where does that figure come from? If the tax produces only £250 million, what happens then?

I made inquiries of the accountants Ernst and Young, and Mr. Ian Hunter said that it was likely that the figures went back to 1995. Eight per cent. of the UK total yield of £1.6 billion would be yielded by 1p on income tax. But there is a problem. Are we talking about earned income or savings? If it is simply earned income, the revenue accruing is likely to be well under £450 million. Could that be clarified?

Thirdly, Scottish businesses suffered injustice over many years when making larger rates payments than their counterparts in England. The uniform business rate seeks to resolve that obvious anomaly. Why, then, should that successful system be devolved to the new Scottish Parliament, which will then have the ability to increase the rates paid or even to restructure the entire system? Is that not going against the level playing field offered to Scottish businesses?

Some comment on those questions at the Minister's convenience would be valuable before we proceed.

5.21 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I want to follow briefly what my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) said. Like him, I recognise the need to be brief, for the reasons that he outlined, but I wish to voice my strong objections to the guillotine motion.

My right hon. Friend is entirely right when he says that there is no justification for this guillotine motion on either narrow or broad grounds. The plain truth is that we can sit here until 10 o'clock without infringing the usual procedures.

The first question that the Minister might care to answer is why we do not have five hours, which would at least take us up to 10 o'clock, which is the usual time for the completion of such business; instead, the debate has been limited to three hours. My strong suspicion is that the Government do not wish to debate the substantial amendments.

In any event, the House will shortly go into recess for three months. If the Government were seriously concerned about debating the amendments, they would postpone our three-month recess by a day or two, or even more. Again, the House might suspect that Ministers do not want to debate the amendments.

That brings me to my last point. I do not believe that the House, either now or at any other time, can properly debate devolution for Scotland or Wales until we see the proposals for England. That is because no plan for devolution in Scotland or Wales will prove sustainable or durable unless it is fair to England. There are a variety of reasons for that. I shall not weary the House by repeating them today, but the House is entitled to know what plans the Government have to make the proposals for Scotland and Wales fair to England. No one has told us that.

On the contrary, the Government have proposed a range of ad hoc measures, such as the reform of the other place and an elected mayor for the city of London. There may be merit in those measures, but we are entitled to see the broad frame of their constitutional proposals. I would wish the debate to go on for day after day, month after month, until we know how the proposals will be made fair to England. We should be concerned with the needs not just of England but of Scotland and Wales. Unless the proposals are fair to England, they will not last in Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Has my right hon. and learned Friend noted that the White Paper on Welsh devolution specifically says that one reason why the people of Wales should be encouraged to vote yes in the referendum is that, otherwise, they would be left behind by the devolution proposals in England, about which we, and they, have not been told?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Government are clearly, on their own account, seeking to be fair to Wales. The one issue that they have not thought to address is that of fairness to England. I wish to see the debate enlarged for as long as may be necessary to address that question.

5.25 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) speaks for England; we would have expected no less of him. When he was the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, he used to act for England, even though he had responsibilities that covered the United Kingdom. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. and learned Gentleman has a different memory from me.

I am delighted that the Opposition will not force the motion to a vote, or I would have found myself voting for a guillotine motion, a rare event in my parliamentary career. Those on the Conservative Benches who were members of the previous Parliament voted for many guillotine motions, and I am sure that Labour Members will find themselves voting for many guillotine motions during this Parliament. I seldom, if ever, vote for guillotine motions, but I certainly would have voted for this one tonight if it had been forced to a Division, and I shall say why.

I asked the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) about the number of people who had voted in the other place. I do not have the exact figures, but I understand that about 200 peers voted on the amendments that we will consider tonight. That is 20 per cent. or less of the total composition of the House of Lords. My goodness, it was lucky that there was not a 40 per cent. rule in the other place when it was addressing those questions.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills) *rose*—

Mr. Salmond: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment if he is fortunate.

The noble Lords could not have considered the amendments of such momentous importance that they were willing to come in droves from the shires to debate and vote on the future of the United Kingdom, or to bring some wisdom to this House to enable us to consider the matters. *[Interruption.]* I do not have a brief for the Labour party; nor do I have a brief for the House of Lords. I am merely pointing out that 80 per cent.—four fifths—of the other place did not bother to vote on the amendments that we are considering; unless I am to believe that 80 per cent. of their lordships were caught in an agony of indecision, frozen on the Benches, not knowing whether to put back the Scottish referendum by a week or bring forward the Welsh referendum by a week. Those were the essential decisions which had to be made and which their lordships were considering.

When we debate a guillotine motion, we should consider the substance of the amendments before us and the importance that their lordships wanted to give to them.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): On the matter of numbers and proportions, the point that the hon. Gentleman has just made very well, does he notice that only a small proportion of Labour Members are here today to debate the Bill? Does that not show that this most important piece of constitutional legislation is not held in high regard by Labour Members?

Mr. Salmond: I do not want to engage in a numbers game with the hon. Lady, but I do not think that the Conservative Benches are packed to overflowing this afternoon. One third of the parliamentary Scottish National party are in their places this evening, and if one third of the other parties were here tonight we would have a fuller House.

The hon. Lady makes my point for me. The absence of her hon. Friends and Labour Members shows that the Lords amendments are not particularly important. Members of the House of Lords did not turn up to vote for them, and Members of the House of Commons have not turned up to vote them down. We should draw the conclusion that the amendments do not constitute points of substance. I regret that. I hold no brief for the House of Lords or for the Labour party, but we have a revising Chamber. *[Interruption.]* I welcome the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), the leader of the Welsh National party, to the Chamber. Yet again, the national parties are well represented.

We should look to a revising Chamber to put to this House points of real substance.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman pointed out that the leader of Plaid Cymru has just come into the Chamber. Could it be that the good representation on the nationalist Benches reflects the fact that nationalist Members understand more clearly than the Labour party that the proposals being put to Scotland and Wales in the referendums will lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom, and that is what they want?

Mr. Salmond: That representation shows the dedication of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru. We are good parliamentarians, even though we have not drafted the legislation. The right hon. Member would do well to leave the future of Scotland and Wales to the judgment of the Scottish and Welsh people. Whatever destination we want for the people of Scotland, one thing on which most democrats are agreed is that the decision will be made by the people of Scotland and Wales, who will be judge and jury.

I hold no brief for the House of Lords, but I had hoped that a revising Chamber that was considering the first referendum in the United Kingdom since 1979 would make points of real substance. Two issues could have been debated tonight if their lordships had felt that these matters were significant. An amendment that examined or asked people to think about the relationship between parliamentary sovereignty and popular sovereignty would have been worth an extended debate in this Chamber. What a pity that such an amendment is not before us. Their lordships seemed to think that other issues were more important.

We could also have discussed a three-way referendum, which is supported by the majority of people in Scotland. The referendum could have been a choice between independence, devolution and the status quo. The right hon. Member for Devizes is nodding. I remind him that, when I put such an amendment to the House in May, Conservative Front Benchers sat on their hands and did not vote, although many Conservative Back Benchers did so. When the matter was pursued in the other place, it was not thought worthy of taking to a vote. Instead, we have these trivial amendments to change the date of the referendum—as if the people of Wales, having debated this issue for a quarter of a century, will change their minds one way or the other because the referendum is a week sooner or a week later. What nonsense, and what an insult to the intelligence of the people of Wales. Why bring to the House amendments that seek to alter the timetable by one week either way?

When we consider a guillotine motion, we should examine the substance of the Lords amendments. I was astonished to learn that, because of the residential requirements, 140 Scottish peers will be entitled to vote in the referendum. I did not know that there were 140 Scottish peers. I have examined what the fully equipped Scottish laird costs the people of Scotland—and, indeed, the people of the United Kingdom. Far too much, in my opinion, if this is the quality of the amendments that they send to this House.

Mr. Hogg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salmond: No.

We would do well to support the guillotine motion, to go forward in this debate and to leave the decision to the people of Scotland.

5.33 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I want to intervene briefly on the issue of the timetable motion. The spectacle of two members of the previous Government declaiming against the evils of the guillotine motion was nauseating. It was rather like Herod coming back after his notorious exhibition and declaiming from the pulpit against the evils of infanticide. We had many guillotine motions in the previous Parliament, which often were not justified and resulted in badly debated legislation. It is intolerable for Conservatives to argue against such a motion now.

I take the point made by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). I cannot remember in which context he made it, but his adjectives "synthetic" and "pathetic" were excellent. Conservative Members have been synthetic and pathetic this evening.

Conservative Members have clearly not read the important report that was published yesterday by the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons. I am a member of that Select Committee: one or two other members may be present, although I do not see any of the Conservative members. Opposition spokesmen have not listened to what their hon. Friends on that Committee have recommended. We must find better ways of ensuring that all parts of a Bill are properly discussed and that we do not end up with the absurdities of timetable motions. It may be a forlorn hope, but I should like this to be the last timetable motion. In future, we should have programming motions that establish at the outset—by agreement, when that can be achieved—sensible ways of dispatching the business of the House to ensure that all parts of a Bill are considered properly.

It is clear that we need not spend a great deal of time on the Lords amendments, but some big issues should have been debated earlier. There would have been a better debate if there had been discussion among all parties to ensure a proper, paced discussion of the Bill. I hope that the Opposition will read the report and understand what their representatives, including the shadow Leader of the House, have signed up to.

It is extremely important to make progress on this legislation. As the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said, in the end democracy will achieve real reform in Wales, Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom. It is time that we got on with the job.

5.36 pm

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): In my 14 years in the House, I have voted against many guillotine motions, but I would have been delighted to vote for this one. When I think of the way in which this odd job lot opposite rammed through the poll tax legislation, in spite of the deep distress and anger of the overwhelming majority of people I represent, I have no sympathy for them. In fact, in the past few minutes I have been intensely amused by these whingeing Tories. The Germans have a word for it: schadenfreude. That fits remarkably well.

I have listened to the endless whingeing of members of a regional party of England who seek to deny what the majority of the people of Scotland so ardently desire, a Scottish Parliament. If in the fulness of time that leads to a federal system with an English Parliament, so be it. As far as I am concerned, they can have one. This legislation is a step in that direction.

The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) often voices a confused view on devolution. He advocates an Assembly for Northern Ireland, yet he is opposed to devolution for the rest of Britain. We should ignore the whingeing of the right hon. Gentleman and the other distressed members of what is thankfully a regional party—and long may it remain so.

5.38 pm

Mr. McLeish: I shall be brief, because the Opposition said that they wanted the maximum time for debate.

Mr. Godman: I forgot to ask the question that I intended to ask. For many years, I have argued for an international architectural competition, such as we had for the national museum of Scotland. Has my hon. Friend considered the feasibility of having that underused building, Holyrood palace, as the location for the Scottish Parliament?

Mr. McLeish: I thought that that was going to be a helpful intervention, but I was then worried that my hon. Friend would suggest that the Parliament should be located in his constituency.

The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) was very ungracious. As several hon. Members have pointed out, it is breathtaking to hear the Opposition—as they now are—talking about guillotines. They seem to want us to involve ourselves in some kind of collective amnesia, to forget that the past 18 years happened and to believe that there were no guillotines. They want us to believe that the procedures of the House were honoured, and that every convention was observed to the letter.

We will take no lectures. Words such as "synthetic", "pathetic", "breathtaking", "arrogance" and "anger" are bandied about—

Mr. Hogg: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McLeish: Not now.

In fact, the only people who will be angry about the Conservative Opposition's reaction are the people of Scotland and Wales, who see their every ambition thwarted by Conservative Members' failure to remember that 1 May was a catastrophic day in the political fortunes of the Conservative party in both Scotland and Wales. They may have missed the important fact that, on 24 July, we published a White Paper relating to Scotland. To put it mildly, there was a sensationally positive reaction in many parts of Scotland.

Mr. Hogg: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McLeish: In a minute.

Let me draw hon. Members' attention to another date. We have had 1 May; we have had 24 July. Now 11 September looms, and the Conservative party in Scotland—and in Wales, a week later—had better sort itself out. The Scottish and Welsh people are not forgiving of a party that fails to address the realities, and to try to do something positive to help those whom its members purport to represent.

Mr. Hogg: Even if we assume that there must be a guillotine, and even if we assume that we must complete the business today, we must ask why the motion does not provide for a five-hour debate, which would have concluded at 10 pm rather than 8 pm.

Mr. McLeish: I do not think that that question need delay us. We are debating the timetable motion.

I am not inclined to waste any more of the House's valuable time. As Opposition Members suggested a few minutes ago, we need time in which to debate the issue—which I might be able to do if hon. Members stopped intervening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked several questions. He suggested that a single person earning more than £30,000 a year would pay £660 in tax. I think that that is about right, but I intend to write to my hon. Friend confirming the details of where the tax will bite. He also asked about the £450 million yield. The source of that figure is Her Majesty's Treasury.

My hon. Friend asked about the uniform business rate. We have written into the devolution package outlined in the White Paper a proposal that legislative powers for local government should be passed to the Scottish Parliament, and we therefore thought it consistent to pass the power relating to the uniform business rate to the Parliament as well. That means that the Parliament itself will decide on the rate in future. The position would have been exactly the same if the power had been retained at Westminster.

I believe that this is a good settlement, for the United Kingdom, for Scotland and for Wales. Is it not appropriate in the mother of Parliaments for the Conservative Opposition to show a little humility? Will they accept that people have rights and aspirations and send us to the House to speak on our behalf? The timetable motion would expedite the business of the House by allowing a structured debate, so that we can ensure that the Welsh and the Scots have a chance to vote on 11 September. If we value democracy, let us start to debate the substantive items.

Question put and agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 1

REFERENDUM IN SCOTLAND

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 1, line 5, leave out ("Her Majesty may by Order in Council") and insert ("the Secretary of State may by order")

5.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): I beg to move, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to take the following: amendment (a) in lieu of the Lords amendment, in page 1, line 5, leave out

'such day as Her Majesty may by Order in Council appoint'

and insert '11th September 1997'.

Lords amendments No. 5, plus the motion to disagree; No. 6, plus the motion to disagree, and amendment (a) thereto; No. 7, plus the motion to disagree; and No. 10, plus the motion to disagree.

Mr. Hain: Lords amendments Nos. 1, 5, 6 and 10 are part of a group made by the Government at the request of the Opposition in another place to incorporate the material on the detailed conduct of the referendums as a schedule to the Bill. We shall debate the rest of that group later. Lords amendments Nos. 1 and 6 deal with the mechanism for specifying the dates of the referendums. The Government have stated their intention to hold the referendum in Scotland on 11 September and the Welsh referendum a week later on 18 September.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Before my hon. Friend goes into the technicalities, will he clarify the position relating to arrangements for opening the sessions of the Welsh Assembly, in view of the somewhat bizarre articles on the front pages of today's editions of *The Guardian* and *The Western Mail*? They almost produced visions of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales using his well-known pull in Washington to persuade President Clinton to come over, step into the breach and—rather like President Kennedy before him—issue from the steps of Cardiff city hall the statement "Ich bin ein Cardiffer". I understand from the Press Association, however, that Buckingham palace has now said that the entire story was a fabrication.

Mr. Hain: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The two journalists concerned, David Hencke of *The Guardian* and Michael Settle of *The Western Mail*, are respected journalists on highly respected newspapers, but they were both sold a pup, if not a corgi. Paragraph 1.20 of the White Paper states clearly:

> "The Assembly will be a Crown body. The Government envisages that Her Majesty the Queen or Her representative would formally open the Assembly after each election."

Following today's story, Buckingham palace issued a press release stating:

> "The Guardian story is nonsense. The wording of the White Paper on this issue means precisely what it says and The Queen was kept informed throughout its preparation. Far from The Queen not wanting to open the Welsh Assembly, it would be very much part of her constitutional role to do so."

As I was saying, the Government have stated their intention to hold the referendum in Scotland on 11 September, with the Welsh referendum a week later on 18 September. In its original form, the Bill allowed the dates of the referendums to be appointed by Her Majesty in Orders in Council. As I said earlier, we shall shortly deal with the amendments to incorporate those orders in the main Bill. Lords amendments Nos. 1 and 6 would replace the original mechanism for setting the dates with a power for the Secretary of State to appoint the dates by order.

The orders would have been used to set down 11 and 18 September. It makes sense to write the dates into the Bill now, rather than requiring an order to be made. We therefore propose amendments in lieu of Lords amendments Nos. 1 and 6 that would do that. Lords amendments Nos. 5 and 10 would then be rendered unnecessary.

Lords amendment No. 7 would require the referendums to be held on the same date. I fail to understand the Opposition's obsession with a single date. There is no reason why the Scottish and Welsh referendums should be held on the same day; they are separate referendums, being held in two separate countries on two separate sets of proposals. There would be as much sense in arguing that the referendum on our proposals for London should be held on 11 September as well.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Over recent weeks, it has been argued strongly that the referendums should be on separate dates. It has been pointed out that our arguments on behalf of Wales will gain the attention only of the London-based press—which, overwhelmingly, is the press that is read in Wales—if the referendum takes place on a separate date from the Scottish referendum. Otherwise, the Welsh arguments will be subsumed into the Scottish arguments. The two White Papers are, of course, quite different.

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, to which I shall return shortly.

We want the referendum to give the people of Wales an opportunity to demonstrate clearly that they endorse our proposals with as high a turnout as possible. To that end, we need to ensure that the people are well informed about our proposals, and that their decision is based on a full and thorough understanding of what the Assembly will mean, what it will do and what it will bring to Wales.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): My hon. Friend said that the electorate should be well informed. Rather than spending approximately £1 million on propaganda to push the yes vote, could you not have spent the money on

[Mr. Llew Smith]

teachers who would otherwise be made redundant? If you refuse to do that, and insist that Government money—taxpayers' money—must be spent—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that when he uses the word you, he addresses the Chair and not a colleague.

Mr. Smith: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister insists on using taxpayers' money to pay for a propaganda exercise. Surely that money could have been allocated to both sides so that the electorate, to use the Minister's words, could have been well informed.

Mr. Hain: I fundamentally disagree with my hon. Friend and I shall explain why. It is no part of the Government's duty to conduct propaganda on behalf of either the yes or the no campaigns. It is part of the Government's duty to inform the electorate about the detail of our policies. Does my hon. Friend seriously suggest that the electorate should be ignorant of the policies on which we are holding a referendum? Surely not. People should be well informed, and the Government are spending prudently and modestly well under £1 million to inform the electorate about our proposals.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I welcome the Minister's assurance about spending a large amount to make sure that everybody is aware of the referendum issues. Does that mean that he will spend equal amounts on advancing arguments for yes and for no?

Mr. Hain: Obviously the hon. Gentleman was not listening to the clear answer. We are not financing yes or no campaigns: we are explaining the Government's proposals.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hain: Hon. Members should calm down.

Does the hon. Gentleman wish the people of Wales to be ignorant of the Government's proposals? The answer is plainly yes. It would be extraordinary if the Government did not seek fairly to put the White Paper's proposals to the people so that, when they are invited to vote in a referendum, they are fully informed on the detail.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Part of the argument put to the people of Wales in the White Paper is, "Look, you must go along with this proposal because it is part of a package of constitutional reform which will include the English regions." There is no package of constitutional reform and we do not know the proposals. It is piecemeal constitutional reform in which each section of the population is being kept in the dark about the intentions of the others. That is one of our reasons for objecting to the referendums being held on different dates. Can the hon. Gentleman not understand that?

Mr. Hain: It is not clear from the hon. Gentleman's question whether he is advocating constitutional reform. Does he support the Government's proposals for devolving power to Scotland and Wales and, increasingly, to the English regions, starting with London next year? His intervention was interesting. I make it absolutely clear that the Government have been careful to put in the White Paper a considered programme for devolving power and decision making to the people of Wales.

We have made an excellent start on informing people. The White Papers for Wales and for Scotland have been best sellers in both countries. I am not sure whether they are selling as well as a Jeffrey Archer novel, although they are selling much better than many of my books. The White Papers are best sellers because there is a thirst for knowledge and an interest in Wales and Scotland in the proposals. The Government intend to continue to inform the public. Both White Papers have been reprinted twice and we shall continue to conduct an information campaign.

Mr. Llew Smith: How many teachers could be employed using the £1 million that is being spent on this propaganda exercise? What is the subsidy per copy of the White Paper on the Welsh Assembly?

Mr. Hain: It is curious and somewhat regrettable that my hon. Friend's question and his argument effectively play into the hands of the Tory Opposition. That is disappointing. I remind him that Conservative policy was responsible for sacking 600 teachers in Wales in the past year. We should concentrate on exposing Conservative attacks on teachers, nurses, the health service and education and on many other areas of public provision in Wales.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): How many extra teachers could be employed using the £1 million that is being spent on the distribution of literature to the people of Wales?

Mr. Hain: Crocodile tears by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen will not do. The Conservatives were responsible for sacking almost 600 teachers in the past year and sacked more in the year before that. They also sacked nurses and cut housing provision. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) repatriated £100 million from the Welsh budget to the Treasury because he was not interested in supporting the Welsh people.

As well as reading our White Paper proposals, people need to debate them and to hear what different interests have to say about them. For that reason, it is important that the referendum in Wales is not held on the same day as the one in Scotland. Regrettably, the national media have a tendency to take less interest in events across Offa's dyke than in events beyond Hadrian's wall. If the referendums were held on the same day, there would be a real risk that our proposals for Wales would receive less public scrutiny and debate than would those for Scotland. People in Wales might arrive at the ballot box after having heard a great deal about a Scottish Parliament and relatively little about proposals for a Welsh Assembly. The people of Wales deserve better. The Conservatives are anxious to keep Welsh people in the dark because they fear a popular tide of opinion for a Welsh Assembly and for our proposals for devolving decision making.

I shall quote from an intere[illegible] study of experience in the last referendum in Wales in 1979. A pamphlet called "The Road to the Referendum" was produced by the Institute of Welsh Affairs—a reputable body which is financed by many different institutions in Wales, including some businesses and the Bank of Wales. That means that Sir Julian Hodge's Bank of Wales was involved in financing the pamphlet, which makes interesting reading, although I am sure that Conservative Members do not want to hear what it contains. It describes the 1979 experience in the following terms:

> "In 1979 the Welsh and Scottish referendums were held on the same day, . . . and UK media attention was focused on Scotland . . . In consequence the distinctive Welsh case for devolution was never fully understood by the Welsh public . . . The case for holding the two referendums on different days . . . is persuasive and is an additional argument for an informed debate".

That is the evidence presented by the Institute of Welsh Affairs in support of the Government's policy for separate referendums. *[Interruption.]* It is evidence from an important study, and the document makes a further point about media coverage in Wales and Scotland. It states:

> "Wales's 'national' media are overwhelmingly located in London. It is estimated that in 1979 the daily circulation of the Welsh morning papers (Western Mail and Daily Post) was slightly less than 150,000 copies, whereas the London morning papers had a circulation in excess of 700,000 in Wales.
>
> The London press was largely uninterested in the devolution issue but when it did consider the subject, concentrated far more on the Scottish dimension . . . a similar pattern emerged in the coverage of the two referendum campaigns on the BBC and ITN main evening news programmes".

That is an important point about media coverage.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hain: I shall finish my point and then let the hon. Gentleman intervene.

The pamphlet continued:

> "The situation today with regard to London's media penetration of Wales is cause for even greater concern. The two Welsh dailies have suffered a significant decline in circulation. The Western Mail and Daily Post now have a combined circulation of less than 100,000 (source: UK Press Gazette/Audit Bureau of Circulation 1996)."

That figure was down from 150,000 last time.

> "The contrast with the position in Scotland is striking. There 90 per cent. of the daily papers in circulation are produced in Scotland. The figures for Wales is 13 per cent."

Furthermore, for television coverage

> "Approximately 35 per cent. of the Welsh population live in what are described as 'overlap areas', enabling them to choose (as many do) to watch programmes from English transmitters. This compares with only 2.5 per cent. for Scotland."

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire) *rose—*

Mr. Hain: Before giving way, as I shall, I must emphasise the fact that there would be less Welsh-only coverage of the debate in Wales. That is why we need a separate day for the referendum, so as to focus debate on our separate proposals.

6 pm

Mr. Livsey: Will the Minister note that, during the 1979 referendum, the academic, Barry Jones of Cardiff, did a study of the coverage and discovered that the *Western Mail* was read by 14 per cent. of the population at that time, while *The Sun*, the most widely read paper, devoted only 1 sq in to coverage of Welsh devolution, all of which represented the no case?

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman makes the point well.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the Minister tell the House the Institute of Welsh Affairs' opinion of the White Paper, and whether it will support the yes campaign?

Mr. Hain: The Institute of Welsh Affairs is an independent body which conducts studies—

Mr. Jenkin: Answer.

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman represents Essex. He is not a Member for a Welsh constituency, and knows nothing about the Institute of Welsh Affairs, yet he presumes to ask such questions. I should be happy to give way to him all the evening if he continued to ask that sort of question.

The Institute of Welsh Affairs is an independent study group, which produced the dispassionate document from which I quoted—*[Interruption.]* Now the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) is laughing too. Is he denigrating the Institute of Welsh Affairs?

Mr. Evans *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hain: I am pleased to see that, because the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) seemed to be doing so.

Our proposals for Scotland and Wales—

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): We in the Ulster Unionist party certainly support the general thrust of the Government's proposals for devolution in Scotland and Wales, and agree that the referendums should be held on two separate dates. However, the Minister's presentation of media coverage is defective, in that it is not a simple matter of who reads which daily paper. The strength of the weekly newspapers in Scotland and Wales, which are read by all the people in both those nations, is important too.

Mr. Hain: That is a fair point. However, I was pointing out that, as I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will accept, the situation in Wales is different from that in Scotland in terms of daily newspaper readership.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hain: I will, but this had better be the last intervention.

Mr. Garnier: I am doubly grateful.

[Mr. Garnier]

Does the Minister accept that, when we talk about media coverage, we are talking about more than newspapers? Whether for good or ill, most people nowadays get their political news from the television. It is therefore the coverage by Granada Television, looking into north Wales, by HTV and by the Welsh television section of the BBC that matters. Those broadcasting companies will give ample coverage, probably great coverage, to the Welsh democratic question. Why should the Minister lack the confidence to allow the debate to go out?

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): He does not know Wales.

Mr. Hain: The hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) is another Conservative based in an English constituency who simply does not understand Wales. I urge him to become better informed. I dealt with the points about television earlier, when I cited evidence from the Institute of Welsh Affairs pamphlet.

It is a fact, although a regrettable one—I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) often complains about it—that a significant proportion, more than one third, of viewers cannot receive Welsh television channels such as HTV Wales or BBC Wales. The hon. and learned Gentleman must be joking if he thinks that Granada Television or HTV West will devote any time, let alone a significant amount of time, to coverage of Welsh issues. They simply do not.

Our proposals for Scotland and Wales are different. There is no reason for the two ballots to be held on the same day. Indeed, there are good reasons for them to be held on distinct days. However, there is every reason to give the people of Wales the time and the opportunity that they deserve to hear and debate our proposals before they go to the polling stations.

We propose to give Wales a real voice for the first time. Real democracy means giving people a real say about decisions over schools, hospitals and jobs. An Assembly will give Wales a better health service by ensuring that scarce resources are spent on nurses rather than pen pushers and form fillers, and better schools by setting tough new standards for literacy, numeracy and overall achievement.

An Assembly will also deliver better job opportunities by providing a voice in Europe and around the world to attract investment and to back Welsh companies. It will provide better value for money by bringing the quangos to public account, and will scrutinise spending decisions. I ask the House to support the Government in upholding the right of the people of Scotland and Wales to have referendums on separate days.

Mr. Jenkin: The Minister's closing remarks did not sound much like the dispassionate advocacy of fact without bias that he claims for the White Paper. When he said that the White Paper was some sort of dispassionate discourse on the pros and cons of a Welsh Assembly, that was one of the more laughable parts of his speech. If that is the basis on which he proposes to overturn Lords amendment No. 7, it rather undermines the strength of his case.

I welcome the fact that the dates of the referendums will be written into the Bill. It is better to put them in primary than in secondary legislation. However, I must point out to the Minister that there would be no need for the debate if the House had discussed the dates properly before the Bill went to the House of Lords.

We must be grateful to the other place for giving us the opportunity to have the debate that was denied us by the guillotine in Committee and on Third Reading. I am reminded of the fact that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) voted for the guillotine—and then got his come-uppance when he was not called to speak on Third Reading. Nothing gave me greater satisfaction than to see the biter bit in that way.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I would gladly forgo a reasonable number of contributions in the House if that would limit the number of anti-Scottish remarks that we so regularly hear from the Conservative Benches. Does the hon. Gentleman really intend to tell the House that the most important aspect that the Conservative and Unionist party can find to talk about concerning the referendum for the Scottish people and the setting up of a Parliament, is the date on which the referendum will be held? Is that magnitude of the Conservative party's contribution?

Mr. Jenkin: If the House of Lords had made the sort of amendments that the hon. Gentleman suggested, which a cursory thought suggests might have been beyond the scope of the Bill in any case—if they were not, why did he not table them himself? *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman tabled a convoluted amendment, concerning a complicated voting structure that some of my colleagues found difficult to support.

I suspect that if the other place had amended the Bill as aggressively as the hon. Gentleman suggested it should have been amended, he would have been the first to jump to his feet and say that it was none of the business of the other place, and that it should not be interfering at all.

This interesting set of amendments underlines the mix-and-match nature of the Bill and the paper, string and sealing wax approach of the Government, because we are amending some of the Government's own Lords amendments.

I wish to concentrate on amendment No. 7. It was felt strongly in the other place that there was no case for the referendums being seven days apart. The Government's only argument concerned media coverage, to which I shall refer later. It was made clear in the other place that the Government wanted as much information to be given to voters as possible. The House will forgive a hollow laugh at that if we consider all the guillotines applied to the Bill to get the debates over as quickly as possible and with as little information reaching the voters as possible.

My noble Friend Lord Crickhowell said that the last devolution referendums in the 1970s were conducted on the same day and that there was no lack of debate. It is only those who lost the argument by a majority of four to one in Wales who are complaining that the information was somehow defective. They are blaming the messengers rather than the message for the result.

If there were a real desire in the Government for the people of Wales and the people of Scotland to have the information that they need, the Prime Minister would fulfil his promise to the House and the Bills would be published in advance of the referendums so that the people of Wales and the people of Scotland would know the details of what they were voting on. That would be a dispassionate and unbiased presentation of fact, instead of the sales brochures issued by the Government.

If information were the determining factor, there would be a delay so that the Bills could be published and to facilitate the maximum amount of debate. Why will there be a gap of only a week? A week may be a long time in politics, but it is short in most people's imaginations. If information is the objective, why not have, say, a six-week or six-month gap between the referendums? The referendum on London, as the Minister pointed out, is not until 1 May, which gives ample time for proper discussion and debate after the publication of the White Paper.

The danger of allowing only a week before the Welsh referendum—given the problems of media coverage to which the Minister alluded—is that there will be saturation coverage in the national and London-based press, which is widely read in Wales, of the result of the Scottish referendum. One can imagine that result being heavily reported on Friday and Saturday, and in the Sunday newspapers, and that its implications will still be considered on the Monday and Tuesday. The debate in Wales will be swamped by the coverage of the Scottish result. Perhaps that is the real intention of the Government.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): What is wrong with that?

Mr. Jenkin: I should be delighted if there were adequate coverage of both decisions, but the compressed gap between the referendums suggests that they want the Scottish result to impinge on the Welsh decision.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Does the hon. Gentleman realise how insulting it is to imply that the people of Wales will simply catch on to the coat tails of the referendum affecting Scotland and that they do not have the ability to make up their own minds? We want the Welsh people to have the fullest possible information and debate to make the right decision—to vote yes.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman should make that point to Ministers who think that there will be some kind of domino effect to get the result they want.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is just as much in the interests of the no campaign to have the referendums in the two countries conducted on different days as it is in the interests of the yes campaign, bearing in mind the fact that a major part of the rhetorical attack by the Conservative party on the Welsh devolution proposals was the drawing of invidious comparisons between the Scottish and Welsh proposals? If the Conservative party is interested in a genuine and focused debate, why does it not support conducting the referendums on two separate dates?

6.15 pm

Mr. Jenkin: I am not interested in helping the no campaign or the yes campaign with regard to the dates of the referendum. The dates should be as neutral as possible. What we have here is the pinnacle of the Government's efforts to manipulate the process of decision making. The process started a long time before the election, when some in the Labour party started to doubt the wisdom of the devolution project. The tartan tax was proving difficult to defend, so Islington Labour came up with the idea of a referendum in Scotland, which meant that there would have to be a referendum in Wales as well.

As ever, the Labour party treats Wales as Scotland's poor relation. A law-making Parliament for Scotland, but only an afterthought Assembly for Wales; tax-raising powers for Scotland, but no tax-raising powers for Wales; a referendum in Scotland with two questions, but a referendum with only one question in Wales. There will be an afterthought referendum for an afterthought Assembly. Is that the reason why Wales will lag Scotland by a week? One purports to be a Parliament; the other will be a talking shop. Why not put the Welsh referendum before the Scottish referendum? That would deal with the issue of newspaper coverage raised by the Minister and would prevent more effectively Scottish coverage interfering with the Welsh proposal, but that exposes the true intention of the Government's proposals.

The referendum was always a gamble. A yes, yes vote in Scotland depends on the speed with which the Government get to the referendum as the gap narrows week by week between the yes and the no voters. There must be no pause for thought. Debate must be curtailed, foreshortened, stifled and guillotined. A gamble that looked worth taking in Scotland suddenly looked reckless in Wales, where people voted the last time by four to one against. So the decision was taken that the referendum in Wales must be held in the wake of Scotland's momentous decision. That is not giving full and impartial information to the Welsh people—indeed, it is quite the reverse.

The Government want the Welsh referendum to be a week after the Scottish referendum to ensure that the last week of debate in Wales is framed, formed and dominated by what Ministers hope will happen in Scotland. That does not follow the precedent of the 1970s, but the devolutionists have learned since then. Too much debate before the decision and the superficial gloss of devolution fades under the light of real scrutiny.

Why not use the Scottish result to influence the Welsh vote? Successive US presidential elections, for example, have shown that the early results from the eastern states have affected behaviour in the western states still voting. The conduct of the recent accession of four new member states to the EU demonstrated the same logic—the country most certain to join, Austria, voted first, followed by Finland, Sweden and Norway. The intention was to ensure that Norway followed the results of the other applicant states.

Mr. Hain: What authoritative evidence does the hon. Gentleman have for saying that western states follow eastern states in their voting habits because they declare at different times?

Mr. Jenkin: The source material is available in the Library, and I have it here. If the Minister wants to read it, he is welcome to do so, but I shall not bore the House with it now.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Is my hon. Friend aware that, in the 1980 US presidential election,

[Mr. Simon Burns]

President Carter conceded on the east coast at 8 pm—four hours before the west coast closed—and that Democrats stopped working in the west coast? Scores of congressmen lost their seats because the Democrats realised that the presidential election had been lost.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for amplifying that matter. Those points and more are contained in the material that I obtained from the Library.

The reversal of amendment No. 7 is a hallmark of the less than impartial way in which Ministers are conducting this process. It proves Clement Attlee's adage that

> "he could not consent to . . . a device so alien to all our traditions as the referendum, which has only too often been the instrument of Nazism and fascism."

It is unfortunate, perhaps, that I have to quote a former Labour Prime Minister to make that point. If Ministers' ruses succeed, it will be a triumph of ministerial manipulation over real open and reasoned debate.

Apart from my name and distant antecedents, I do lack Welshness, but if I could claim to be Welsh I would feel insulted that Wales is to be treated in that way. It did not work with Norway's accession to the EU and there is no guarantee that it will work with Wales.

Mr. John Smith: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me early in the debate. This is my first opportunity to address the House since my return at the general election, and, if you will allow me, I shall take this opportunity to thank colleagues on both sides of the House for the warm welcome that I received on my return and for their assistance in helping me to settle back into the House.

I also place on record my thanks to the people of the Vale of Glamorgan—the jewel in the Welsh crown—for returning me at the last election, following my short absence after the intervention of the overseas vote in 1992.

It is an illustration of the level of ignorance and arrogance that abound in this debate that we are even here to discuss the amendment. That it could come from the other place in this form proves to me, and, I believe, to the people of Wales, just how little the Opposition and Members of the other place who voted this through know and understand about my country, Wales. They could not have challenged the decision to separate the dates for the referendums if they had had a cursory understanding of our country, which is much smaller than Scotland, does not have the same media infrastructure and is a completely different country. That explains why the two proposals before the two countries for both the referendum and the subsequent Bill are completely different.

Mr. Ancram: If that is the case, why have only a week? The hon. Gentleman's argument suggests that one needs more time to make a distinction between the two.

Mr. Smith: A week is ample time for the people of Wales, who are very intelligent, talented, and able to make a decision. What we do not want is for the debate to be dominated in the media in the immediate run-up to the referendum by the Scottish arguments.

Mr. Gray: If Welsh people are as intelligent, able and far-sighted as the hon. Gentleman describes, surely they could see through the discussion of the Scottish devolution question in the press that week and make up their own minds in Wales, without our necessarily having to make the votes a week apart.

Mr. Smith: We would support the fullest and most informed and open debate on this referendum. That is why we want all the arguments aired in the media in the week running up to the vote.

Mr. Grieve: When the matter was first debated in the House on Second Reading, we were assured that there would be ample time for discussing the Bill before the referendum. Then we were told that the Bill would not be published, and we would have the White Papers. Now we have them, and, effectively, we have five hours to discuss them both before Parliament goes into recess. How can that be a full discussion of the issues so that the people can make an informed choice?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is an important, contentious and serious matter. A large number of hon. Members are trying to catch my eye, and, as we know, there is a limited amount of time for debate. If interventions could be kept short and few, it would assist the flow of the debate.

Mr. Smith: I thank you for those comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am beginning to regret extending thanks to both sides for my warm welcome back.

I must tackle an important point, which makes the difference between the two debates and votes that will take place in Scotland and Wales. As I said, Wales is a different country, and it faces different problems. One problem that I hope will be discussed in the run-up to the referendum on 18 September is that of the absence of a business voice for Wales—an absence which has developed in the past 18 years.

Hon. Members talk about this debate being a threat to the unity of the United Kingdom, and of a yes vote undermining that unity. Nothing could be further from the truth. A yes vote will strengthen the bond within the United Kingdom, not merely through a devolution of political power—important and essential though that is—but through what in some respects is more important: the devolution of economic power following the concentration of the past 18 years.

That concentration undermines the fabric of the United Kingdom—the fact that 35 per cent. of the gross domestic product of this country is now produced in a small part of the United Kingdom: in London and the south-east of England. A concentration of wealth has been moving in that one direction for far too long. If we do not reverse that concentration and the spread of jobs and investment, there could be serious problems for the bonding within this great country, the United Kingdom.

One of the main reasons why there has not been a diversification and devolution of economic power and investment in Wales is the appalling business image of Wales that has developed in the United Kingdom in recent years. The majority of investors in Wales do not come from overseas, and they are not indigenous. The majority of investment in the Principality comes from the rest of the United Kingdom. Two thirds of all investment in Wales is predominantly English, and as a country we depend on it.

I am sure that hon. Members are aware from earlier debates on the general subject that Wales has done well in attracting direct foreign investment—in fact, double the United Kingdom average. That is a good record, and one to be proud of.

What hon. Members may not be aware of—it is an issue that needs to be introduced in the run-up to the referendum, and a reason why we undoubtedly need a second date—is that Wales under-performs in relation to the other regions of the United Kingdom when it comes to the share of UK investment. That partly explains why, in 1979, Wales was the highest waged economy in the UK and now it is the lowest. That would explain why, in 1979, we produced above the average GDP per capita in the United Kingdom, but now Wales has the lowest, at 85 per cent.

We have attracted direct foreign investment; we have failed to attract investment from the United Kingdom. In other words, we can attract Lucky Goldstar from Korea—the other side of the world—but we have a great deal of difficulty in attracting investment from the other side of the Severn bridge, because we do not have a business voice for Wales. We do not have a focus for getting the message across that Wales in general, and south Wales in particular, is one of the most attractive investment locations in the European Union; the majority of investors in the United Kingdom think that it is not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have given the hon. Gentleman considerable latitude on his return to the House, but he is an old hand, and he knows that he must speak to the terms of the amendment.

Mr. Smith: I am attempting to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by stressing the unique economic problem facing Wales that can be addressed only if we have votes on separate days. I want to make the point as clear as I can, because it causes me, as it should the people of Wales, great concern.

6.30 pm

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): The hon. Gentleman makes some powerful points, but to get all those points across to the people of Wales in one week would be rather difficult. Surely the referendums should therefore be either on the same day or, as has already been suggested, six months apart.

Mr. Smith: The people of Wales are entirely able to appreciate the point and make up their own minds on the matter.

Mr. Evans: As a Welshman, who has spent most of his life in Wales—I have been in politics for 23 years, 17 of which were in Welsh politics—I know that the Welsh people are intelligent and able. We should either have the referendums on the same day—because the Welsh people are intelligent enough to know that they are being offered something different—or sufficiently far apart to enable them to concentrate on the fact that the referendums are different.

Mr. Smith: The people of Wales are extremely talented, intelligent and able. That is why they cleared out the Tories at the last election.

We, and other regions of the United Kingdom, do not succeed in attracting our fair share of UK investment, mostly because of sheer ignorance, especially in London and the south-east of England. When asked how far south Wales was from London, more than 80 per cent. of English investors got it wrong by more than 100 miles.

When asked what were the dominant industries in south Wales—now, in 1997, not in 1937 or 1947—more than half the respondents thought that it was still dominated by coal and by metal manufacture, and was full of slag heaps and smoking chimneys. Nothing could be further from the truth, but that has impeded investment. People think that Wales, and industrial south Wales in particular, is a remote investment region in the European Union. That is stopping British investment into Wales.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful case about ignorance throughout the United Kingdom of affairs in Wales. I agree that there is considerable ignorance about Scottish and Welsh affairs, and, indeed, devolution.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, although the referendums are to take place on 11 September and 18 September, it would have been much better if the Government had had the courage to wait until the people of Wales and Scotland—and, indeed, the rest of the United Kingdom—had had the chance properly to consider what devolution would really mean? To overcome the ignorance of which he spoke, should not the devolution Bills have been put before the people before they were asked to vote in a referendum?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. I remind the House that interventions should be brief and to the point; they should not be small speeches.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That was not an intervention; it was indeed a speech.

I want to draw attention to perhaps the most worrying and disturbing reason why UK investors do not invest in Wales.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am delighted to welcome the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) back to the House, but I wish that he would concentrate on the amendment. We have limited time to discuss this issue, and his speech amounts to no more than a Government filibuster. I urge you to bring the hon. Gentleman to order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair is responsible for deciding whether hon. Members are speaking to the point, but I must tell the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) that I was in the Chamber when the other Deputy Speaker asked him to speak to the amendment, since when he has conspicuously failed to do so. I should be grateful if he would now do just that.

Mr. Smith: I will indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The point that I am trying to make about the amendment is that there are distinct and different arguments to be advanced in the run-up to the referendums for Scotland and Wales. That is why we most definitely need to have the votes on different days.

[Mr. Smith]

We do not attract our fair share of investment because of the sometimes appalling attitude towards us of English investors.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman now bring his remarks to a very prompt close?

Mr. Smith: I will indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The voice for Wales, the Welsh Assembly, could do a great deal in a short time completely to turn round the false business image of the Principality that exists in London and the south-east of England. That is why we should disregard the Lords amendment, and the people of Wales should vote resoundingly yes on 18 September, in the interests of the future jobs and prosperity of our country.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I think that it was P. G. Wodehouse who said that it was not difficult to tell the difference between a ray of sunshine and a Scot with a grievance. Perhaps we could say that it is not difficult to tell the difference between a ray of sunshine and a Member of Parliament with an English constituency who has a grievance against Scotland and Wales. This parading of anti-Scottish and anti-Welsh prejudices will do absolutely nothing for any prospects of the revival of the Conservative party in those countries.

Mr. Gray: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salmond: If the hon. Gentleman will sit down for a second, I will give way to him a little later. I intended to make a very brief speech, but if the Conservative party continually diverts me with a series of interventions, who knows how long I could go on?

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman's point about a hatred for Scotland and Wales among my hon. Friends is entirely false. He will know, if he has studied his Dod, that most of those who are speaking in this debate—even if, like me, they represent English constituencies—are 100 per cent. Scottish. I love Scotland more than he does, if I may say so. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] As much as he does, then. On what grounds does he accuse us of hating Scotland?

Mr. Salmond: I do not try to evaluate hon. Members' love for their countries as the hon. Gentleman does. Whether he loves Scotland more than I do is a matter for debate, but in electoral terms, the people of Scotland certainly love my party more than they love his party or him personally, and his love of Scotland does not extend to trying to further his political prospects there; he obviously considers the pastures greener down south.

An interesting survey was conducted of Scottish attitudes to the Conservative party. I was not surprised to find that the majority of people in Scotland felt that the Conservative party was anti-Scottish, but I was surprised to find—this was just before the general election—that the majority of people who intended to vote Conservative thought that the Conservative party was anti-Scottish. I rest my case on that point.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way at such an apposite moment. Will he do all in his power to correct the misapprehension among the Scottish people? There are no anti-Scottish Members in the House as far as I am aware. Or is it part of his party's programme to foment resentment among the Scottish people to promote his nasty nationalism?

Mr. Salmond: I have often pronounced myself one of the most anglophile of all Scottish Members. I am prepared to defend that. I have certainly forgotten more about English history than many Conservative Members have ever learnt. We present our case for Scotland in a positive way. We do not spend our time being antagonistic about other nations. That contrasts heavily with the attitude of the Conservative party.

Mr. Jenkin: No.

Mr. Salmond: At a time when a majority of Conservative voters in Scotland feel that the party is anti-Scottish, I believe that it is reasonable for me to draw that to the attention of the House. The hon. Gentleman should address himself to the remnants of the Conservative party and try to convince them that his party is not anti-Scottish, rather than direct his remarks to me.

Furthermore, at a recent Scottish Conservative conference held in the aftermath of the general election, one of the few things on which the delegates agreed was that the great difficulty that the party suffered was that it was seen as anti-Scottish. I have to say to Conservative Members gathered here that that seems to be a reality.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman has changed his tune.

Mr. Salmond: I have not. I am trying desperately not to be condescending or patronising to the hon. Gentleman, who is making it difficult for me not to be. I shall try not to patronise him.

I offer a piece of gentle advice—that the nature of the arguments and the way in which they are put by Conservative Members is not conducive to an enormous revival of the Conservative party's fortunes in Scotland and Wales. In my party political interest, I suppose that I would say, "Keep putting the arguments in the way you are doing. Keep at it. You will continue to return zero Members of Parliament in Scotland." It would be impossible under proportional representation to return zero Members of the Scottish Parliament, but if the Conservative party continues to operate in the way it is, as a party and as a front organisation for the think twice campaign, there will be a prospect of its gaining no Members of the Scottish Parliament.

I intended to address some brief remarks to the amendment before I was led astray by the serried ranks of Conservative Members. Is there an argument that one cannot have change, whether constitutional or other, on different days in different countries of the United Kingdom? There may or may not be, but it is certainly not an argument that will be put with any conviction by the Conservative party. I seem to recall that the poll tax—a huge instrument of taxation—was introduced by the Conservative party, not a week earlier in Scotland than elsewhere but a full year earlier.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: The benefit was yours.

Mr. Salmond: The benefit was ours, yes. The Conservative party will have to acknowledge that the cost of the poll tax in administrative terms and in transitional relief was £1,000 million. If Conservative Members are worried about the cost of the Scottish Parliament, they might dwell on the fact that it would be possible to run a Scottish Parliament for half a century for the cost of one bad, undemocratic, unresponsive decision forced upon the Scottish people by the Conservative party.

Nor does a Unionist party make a good case when it argues that constitutional change must take place on the same day in different countries. According to that argument, Wales could not have joined the Union until Scotland did, and Scotland presumably could not have joined until Ireland did. It is a farcical argument. If one accepts that Scotland and Wales are nations, surely they have the right to decide, whether on one day or another. The peoples of Scotland and Wales are adult enough to make up their own independent minds, on whatever day the referendums are held.

A much more substantial argument about the referendum is why there will be two questions in Scotland. It is farcical. Why will there be no independence question on the ballot paper? It seems passing strange that, in the debate on the Lords amendments, instead of discussing and reflecting on matters of substance, we are involved in a debate of little matter.

Although I caution the Conservative party that it should not continue in the vein that it has adopted, I dare say that we have a party political interest in a parade of more prejudice in the Chamber tonight. Either through its own activities or through its front organisation, the think twice campaign, the Conservative party should not place itself irredeemably in antagonistic opposition to the peoples of Scotland and Wales.

Even within the ranks of the Conservative party, there cannot be unanimity on the wisdom of the attitude that Conservative Members portray. I know that it is difficult for Conservative Members from English constituencies, in the aftermath of an election which saw their party cleared out of the nations of Scotland and Wales, to think beyond their constituencies and their regional interests, and anticipate the reaction in Scotland and Wales to the attitude that they are striking. However, it would benefit the debate if they tried to look beyond their prejudices.

6.45 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I have no difficulty in supporting my right hon. Friends on this matter, because the proposals for Scotland and Wales are totally different. I think that I was the one Scot who sat through the Welsh debate on Friday. After listening to my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and many other colleagues, I realised yet again that the position in Wales was different.

The events of last week, study of the White Paper, the hype surrounding the White Paper, the image created by the party at Edinburgh castle and, not least, *The Scotsman* on Friday morning going simply overboard, confirmed my view that we are at the beginning of a motorway without exit to something indistinguishable from a separate Scottish state.

Therefore, I believe that there should be two statements in the referendum. The first should be, "I want to remain part of Britain." The second should be, "I want a Scottish state separate from England." That is the choice, as indeed it may always have been. Any hope of an acceptable halfway house devolution solution evaporated with the decision to hold a pre-legislative referendum rather than a post-legislative one on the meaningful question, "Do you approve of the Scotland Act 1997-98, as passed by Parliament?"

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I oppose the Government's proposals today, in the sense that they seek to fix a date. I would prefer not to fix a date. In other words, I should prefer to adhere to the procedure in the original Bill. Perhaps I might briefly explain the reason for that.

Devolution in Scotland can survive only if it is fair to England. I am not at the moment arguing against devolution in Scotland or Wales. I believe that it is contrary to the interests of the people of both countries, but that is a different point. Devolution can last only if it is fair to England. I believe that, if referendums are held in September—whether on the 11th or the 18th does not matter for these purposes—there will be a debate on a false understanding of the facts in Scotland and Wales. If the thing is to last, changes cannot be contemplated in Scotland and Wales which are distinct from appropriate arrangements here in England.

If we are to have devolution in Scotland and Wales, there will be a fundamental change in the way in which we govern the United Kingdom. That could take a number of forms. It could take the form of a federal constitution, with four national Parliaments and a federal Parliament. That is one way forward, which is perfectly logical.

Another way forward would be to say of Scottish Members that there must be a fundamental diminution in their number and role at Westminster and that they right to participate in the English debates needs to be reduced, so that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. May I remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman, as I have reminded other hon. Members, that we are debating a narrow amendment about two separate dates for the referendums. He must address his remarks to that.

Mr. Hogg: Forgive me, but the question that I am addressing, which is in order, is whether there should be a date fixed for the Bill or whether no date is fixed, as is the case at the moment, and it is left at the discretion of the Government to fix by Order in Council.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is for the Chair to decide what is in order and what is not. I simply ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman to address his remarks to the specific amendment before us.

Mr. Hogg: Forgive me, but the question that the House is considering is whether there should be a fixed date or no date. That is the question before the House at the moment. I am arguing that there should be no date, because one must look at constitutional changes and arrangements in the broad. One needs to contemplate what changes will have to be made to the entire government of the United Kingdom before the peoples of Scotland and Wales decide whether they want devolution in their respective parts of the United Kingdom.

[Mr. Hogg]

If one insists on a date, whether it be 11 September or 18 September, it is certain that those broader proposals will not be put forward and argued. In other words, the peoples of Scotland and Wales, if they are to vote in referendums on either 11 or 18 September, will not do so in the full knowledge of the long-term consequences to the constitution of devolution in those two parts of the United Kingdom.

That is precisely why I say that we should not fix a date, so that we can set a later date, be it at the end of the year, perhaps next year, or the year after—it does not matter for these purposes—when we can give proper consideration to the consequences of devolution in Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Wigley: I am following the right hon. and learned Gentleman's argument about why there should be a longer period—a much longer period, possibly, as he sees it, for a fuller debate on possible alternative solutions and the implications for the England and the United Kingdom. Would not that argument be stronger if the Conservative party had fought the general election with positive proposals for the future of Wales and Scotland, and indeed the United Kingdom, rather than arguing that a thousand-year history would come to an end, and offering a totally negative attitude towards devolution?

Mr. Hogg: That is a matter for political debate. I am now expressing my own view. I am not hostile to the principle of devolution in Scotland and Wales if that is what the people there really want. I insist to the House on the importance of the referendums being conducted according to a full knowledge and understanding of the consequences of devolution in Scotland and Wales on the overall structures of the United Kingdom.

That debate has not been opened up, and will not be started before the referendums in September. That is a powerful argument against fixing a date in September.

Mr. Hanson: Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman suggesting that I and the other 33 Labour Members elected on 1 May should break our promise to the electorate to hold an Assembly vote within the first year of the Parliament? That is what the right hon. and learned Gentleman is asking for. His party offered to maintain the status quo, and it was overwhelmingly defeated at the election .

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman has an obligation to speak truthfully to his constituents and to the people of Wales. I am sure that he will do so, and I am not suggesting for a moment that he would not. If he agrees with me, however, that the proposals now before the House in broad form in the White Papers for Scotland and Wales cannot be the end of the story because they do not address the problem of England and fairness of treatment for it, it follows inevitably that profound changes to the way in which we will have to govern the United Kingdom will be down the track—for example, a federal structure.

We need to ventilate that argument before the referendums, so that the people of Wales and Scotland have an opportunity to assess whether in reality that is what they want. If they do, so be it—that is what will happen—but we need to have an informed debate. That is why I am against a fixed date and in favour of an open date, in the I hope that I can persuade the Government that those referendums should be held on a later date rather than an earlier one.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: I support the rejection of the Lords amendments, which have tried to insist on having the two referendums on the same day, because of the old problem, sometimes known as the "and Wales" problem.

When we discuss politics and public affairs, we normally refer to England and Wales, and Wales is always the afterthought. Until quite recently, the famous entry in "Encyclopaedia Britannica" was "for Wales, see England", and reference was always to England and Wales. When it comes to discussing devolution, one always refers to Scotland and Wales. The problem of the "and Wales" afterthought is why we need a cordon sanitaire between the dates of the Scottish referendum and the Welsh referendum.

That is also why one could not have the Welsh referendum before the Scottish referendum. That would not solve the problem, because the degree of interest in Scottish devolution even among the London media—even though, by and large, the London media are not of great relevance in Scotland—is still so great that they would discuss the Scottish referendum and devolution in preference to Welsh devolution and the Welsh referendum, even if the latter were held first. The media would simply continue to discuss Scottish devolution even after that referendum, because there would be no Welsh devolution referendum to discuss. That is the problem.

How do we guarantee a suitable concentration of interest on Welsh devolution? We can only do so by making sure that there is a period when the Scottish referendum is over, which means that we and the London media could then concentrate on Wales.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): In effect, the hon. Gentleman is repeating the arguments made by the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain)—that the people of Wales are incapable of making that decision, and that they are ignorant. According to the Under-Secretary, it was *The Sun* wot won it. It is an insult to the Welsh people to suggest that they cannot make that decision without being sanitised from the London media. He is making an argument for a delay of six months.

Mr. Morgan: The hon. Gentleman needs to develop a little more expertise in the affairs of Wales and Scotland before he makes contributions to such debates. Obviously he was not listening earlier.

The issue is whether any part of the United Kingdom could expect to make an informed decision without media coverage. We rely on them. We can expect more measured coverage from the BBC, the ITV stations and Channel 4. We will also get detailed coverage from *The Sun* and other tabloids as well the broadsheets, which are not bound by obligations to offer balanced coverage. Among them all, however, people could expect to receive reasonably informed information.

One cannot expect such coverage if the media do not discuss Welsh devolution. We have found that, when it is covered, it is only by having 100 per cent. horse manure thrown at it, as we saw this morning in the article on page 1 of *The Guardian*, which was repeated word for word on page 1 of *The Western Mail*. Those articles implied that the Queen wants to tell the people of Wales that they will not get the real McCoy. This afternoon, however, we learned that that story was total garbage from start to finish.

Unfortunately, that is the type of coverage we get. It is not serious coverage, but we would get such coverage provided the dates of the referendums were kept apart by a reasonable period. We suggest that it should be a gap of seven days, and the Opposition argue that there should be no gap, or a gap of 14 days or 28 days. They cannot have it both ways—they must think that those referendums should be held either on the same day or on separate ones.

Mr. Evans: The same day.

Mr. Morgan: I am sorry to tell the hon. Gentleman that most of his colleagues have acted like a rabble on this issue. Sometimes they argue for the same day; sometimes they argue for a six-month separation. Indeed, that is what the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) suggested just now. Which do the Conservatives want? The official position of the Opposition Front-Bench team is the same day, but the rest of the Tories are in disarray.

Mr. Evans: We say that the people of Wales are intelligent and able, so let us hold the referendums on the same day. The people of Wales can work out the issues for themselves.

7 pm

Mr. Morgan: The hon. Gentleman is a media expert: he sells newspapers for a living. He is known as Nigel the News. As good Welshmen, we are all agreed, of course, that the Welsh are an intelligent people. We should all be singing from the same hymn sheet—singing those old Welsh hymns such as Cwm Rhibble.

The issue, however, is not whether the people of Wales are as intelligent as the European average—they are far above that average; otherwise they would not have wiped out the Tory party on 1 May. The issue concerns whether they can be expected to come to an informed decision in the referendum vote if there is not enough media coverage. Unless the two dates are separated, coverage of the Welsh referendum will not be separate from coverage of the Scottish one in the media—that is the problem.

Just how intelligent coverage of the issue is became plain when Tory peers in the other place claimed that the Welsh media would do the job, and that it achieved the same penetration in Wales as the Scottish media do in Scotland. Those Tory peers distinguished themselves by calling the national newspaper of Wales the *Western Morning News*—until it was pointed out that that is a newspaper in the south-west of England.

Another Opposition peer distinguished himself by saying that S4C broadcasts to north Wales in the Welsh language—until it was pointed out to him that S4C is the national Welsh language television station. These people know nothing about the Welsh media, yet they try to lecture us, representing the constituencies of Wales, on it.

In this Chamber, the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) once again failed to understand the Minister's point about the "shadow effect". The problem is that 35 per cent. of the people of Wales have better television reception from transmitters in England than from Welsh transmitters, and many have no Welsh reception at all. The same does not apply to Scotland, of course.

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that I have got him off the hook of the Welsh media on a number of occasions. The important question concerns the Government's order of priorities. Why are they trying to overturn the Lords amendment when, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) pointed out, there are plenty of other, more important, issues to discuss?

Mr. Morgan: The hon. and learned Gentleman has not yet absorbed the lesson of the independent academic study done in 1979, which showed that Welsh newspapers are read by only 13 per cent. of the Welsh population, whereas Scottish papers are read by 90 per cent. of the Scottish population.

It is not just that the referendum legislation for the two countries is quite different; it is also the fact that the economic and media integration of Wales and England are very different from the Scottish situation. So a separation of the arguments in the media can be achieved only by two referendums held on separate days—seven days apart, under the Government proposal.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you well know, I am all for free speech. Is it in order for the Conservative Whip to tour the Conservative Benches discouraging Conservative Members from speaking in the debate? He almost cut off my old university friend, the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), in full flow.

Self-determination for Scotland, self-determination for Wales—but is it not in order to allow Tory Members self-determination?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The order in which hon. Members speak, and whether they choose to speak at all, are not matters for the Chair.

Mr. Donald Gorrie (Edinburgh, West): The Conservatives are trying to raise to a point of principle the idea that two referendums must not be held a week apart. They seem to be a new form of Seventh Day Adventists. If the Almighty managed to create the world in seven days, the Welsh electorate should be able to absorb the necessary arguments in seven days. It is rubbish to maintain that the referendums can be held on the same day, although miles apart, but not a week apart.

Another suggestion is that the Government are cunningly following a plot devised by the European Union—successive voting. That great plot clearly did not work for the EU, in that Norway did not vote the right way. So if it is a plot, it is not a very clever one.

It is complete rubbish to say that adequate information was provided before the last referendum, as anyone who took part in it—I doubt whether many Conservative Members did—will testify. There was a serious lack of information, and that had an adverse effect on the result.

[Mr. Donald Gorrie]

The Conservatives have also pooh-poohed the idea of the Government putting out a piece of paper summarising the White Paper. The Conservatives say that that is propaganda and a wicked misuse of public funds. I remind them that the Conservative Government spent a great deal of public money on propaganda in favour of the school boards, in favour of opting out—they hoped in vain that lots of Scottish schools would go for it—and in favour of local government reorganisation. There is thus a long history of Governments setting out information for the benefit of the citizen. Thereafter it is up to the yes and no campaigns to produce their own propaganda.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who appears to have gone, argues that the exercise will lead inevitably to independence. I see no example in history of an intelligent form of devolution leading to independence. Indeed, there are many examples to the contrary. A federal system can lead to a country staying together which would not otherwise have done so. That will happen with this form of devolution.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Many of us have been waiting with great patience to speak on the Lords amendment. You have already said that Members should direct their remarks to the amendment. Would you care to repeat that ruling?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Those matters can be safely left to the Chair.

Mr. Gorrie: I am rebutting, one by one, arguments advanced in this debate.

Another Conservative argument is that we should do nothing until it becomes clear what should happen throughout the United Kingdom. One of the great merits of the Government's proposals for Scotland and Wales is that they will cause the English to think more carefully about how they want England to be run. That will be a great step forward. We should support the Government, because the arguments against holding the referendums seven days apart are spurious.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I wholly agree with the excellent arguments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan). The media attention that Wales would attract is certainly a key issue. There is certainly a Wales and England question, which my hon. Friend set out cogently.

I wholly reject the argument that we need more information. To those who have been slumbering, I would point out that there has been a general debate going on since the early 1970s and beyond in Wales and Scotland about the broad issue of devolution. The public will not be moved to vote either yes or no by the details of the Bill. They will come to a general view as to whether they believe that there should be an Assembly. The subsections of the Bill will be wholly irrelevant. If we are to have an intelligent and separate decision, as we suggest, we must proceed broadly along the lines that the Government want.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): There is a much more fundamental question, and perhaps the hon. Gentleman will answer it. Given that the possible outcomes of both referendums will be to alter dramatically and irrevocably both the powers and the constitution of the United Kingdom House of Commons, how can it be justified that the English should be altogether excluded from the referendums?

Mr. Anderson: The hon. Gentleman set out that case at great length and with great cogency during the previous debate. We can raise as many bogeys as we will about fundamental change in the UK constitution as a whole, fragmentation and the slippery slope to the break-up of the United Kingdom, but I believe that our people are far too mature to fall for those bogeys.

Let me end by saying, yes, there are powerful arguments of substance, but there is also the question of procedure. On an issue relating to elections, the manner in which elections should be held and the timing of elections, the other place should exercise a certain restraint. We should not put particular weight on the views of the other place on matters of electoral politics. By definition, its Members are not themselves subject to elections, so we should give little weight to what they have to say. We should proceed as we were minded to proceed and reject what the other place has put forward. Let the people of Wales have what we want—our own referendum, unaffected by that in Scotland, on which we can have our own debate. Let us reject the amendment.

Mr. Hain: I shall reply briefly to the debate and take up especially the points made by the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), whom I welcome to the Dispatch Box. I shall go further and welcome him to come into Wales and campaign for the no vote—indeed, I am tempted to offer him his fare on the strength of his contribution this evening. The image presents itself of Essex boy—or perhaps I should say Essex boyo—invading Wales and taking on the people of Blaenau Gwent and the Rhondda. I invite him to come to the Neath valley—to Cwmllynfell or Ystalafera—to parade his wares around the doorsteps and press his case for a no vote. He would get a swift response, however, because the people of Wales are supporting Labour's campaign for a yes vote.

I was fascinated by one of the hon. Gentleman's slips of the tongue, when he said that he was not interested in helping the no campaign. That really shows that the Tories are on the run. Last Sunday, his leader pulled the rug from underneath the entire Conservative opposition, by saying that he virtually conceded that the Government would win the yes vote in Wales and Scotland and that he would not seek to reverse the decision. The right hon. Gentleman effectively conceded the case for devolution in Scotland and Wales, and now the hon. Member for North Essex says that he is not interested in helping the no campaign.

Furthermore, the hon. Gentleman tried to ride two horses at the same time, by saying both that he was opposed to the Government's proposals for Scotland and that he wanted those for Wales to be the same. In other words, he wanted a no vote in Wales because there were no tax-raising powers in the proposals for a Welsh Assembly. He really should clear his lines and decide what his opposition is based on. The hon. Gentleman also asked why Wales was not going first; I shall tell him. Quite simply, Wales is not going first because Scotland's school holidays are earlier than those of Wales and we want the people of Scotland and Wales to have the opportunity when they come back from their holidays to hear the arguments on both sides of the case and then to make up their mind fairly and freely.

The hon. Gentleman then made the extraordinary pronouncement on behalf of the Front-Bench spokesmen and officially on behalf of the Conservative party that referendums were an instrument of Nazism and fascism. Is he really saying that? We should be told. Is the Conservative party now saying that it will never support referendums in Britain because they are instruments of Nazism and fascism? That is the real face of the Tory party—denying the right of the people of Wales and Scotland to be consulted about our proposals for a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly.

The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) also made a revealing slip, when he said that he might concede that the referendum should happen next year, or the year after, or the year after that—disappearing over the horizon. Why does he say that? Because he does not want a referendum and because he is afraid of the result whereby the referendum will give an overwhelming mandate for our proposals for a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly.

7.15 pm

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is also inviting the Government to do something that the previous Government did just about every other week they ruled, which is break our promises to the electorate. We promised that the people of Wales and Scotland would be offered a Welsh Assembly and a Scottish Parliament after a referendum in our first year of office. We are fulfilling our election promises in that respect, as we are doing in so many other areas of policy.

In conclusion, the Conservatives are really frightened of democracy. They are frightened of putting the matter to the people's vote in the referendums. I am not surprised that they are frightened of democracy, because they were wiped out in terms of parliamentary representation in Scotland and Wales. I am confident that we shall win the referendums in Scotland and Wales, and when we have done so, not only shall we have delivered democracy to Scotland and Wales, but we shall have beaten the Conservatives yet again.

Question put, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 349, Noes 134.

Division No. 75] **[7.17 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard *(Shef'ld Hallam)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Thomas
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna
(Perth)
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny
(Wolverh'ton SW)
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*

Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Webb, Professor Steve
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wigley, Dafydd
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Graham Allen and
Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*

Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Whittingdale and
Mr. James Cran.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 1 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 2, in page 1, line 6, after "and" insert "income".

Mr. McLeish: I beg to move, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 15 and 16 and the Government motions to disagree thereto.

Mr. McLeish: The people of Scotland will be asked whether they agree that there should be a Scottish Parliament and whether it should have tax-varying powers. The amendment would require specific reference to income tax-varying powers.

The key to this is to understand what the people of Scotland are asked to agree with. It is not some vague notion of an independent Scotland or some never-never promise of better things to come from the Conservative party; they will be asked whether they agree with the Government's proposals, and it says so on the ballot papers.

The Government have set out their proposals in the White Paper "Scotland's Parliament", published last Thursday. Chapter 7 sets out the financial arrangements for the Scottish Parliament, including the tax-varying power. Opposition Members are no doubt familiar with it. It says:

> "Subject to the outcome of the proposed referendum on this issue the Scottish Parliament will be given a power to vary tax.
>
> The Government propose that the tax varying power should operate on income tax".

It is crystal clear that the tax-varying power on which the referendum asks the people of Scotland to give their views is the power to vary income tax. The chapter describes in detail how the system would operate, the amount by which tax could be varied, who would be liable to pay it and what would happen in the event of the UK income tax structure changing.

We have consistently argued that the questions to be put to the people should be at the level of principle, backed up by the detail contained in the White Paper. If we are to add the word "income", why not also include the 3p in the pound limit or a definition of who should pay the tax? We could keep adding qualifications until the questions on the ballot papers were half a page long. Similarly, we shall not ask on the ballot papers whether a Scottish Parliament should have powers over the health service in Scotland or over any other matters set out in the White Paper.

I accept that a balance must be struck between keeping the questions simple and giving voters enough details so that they clearly know what they are voting for.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Will the Minister look behind him and comment?

Mr. McLeish: Such a question does not require an answer. In any case, I should not like to dignify it.

Mr. Dalyell: Quality always makes up for numbers.

Mr. McLeish: I never have a problem with my hon. Friend's interventions. This evening, a completely fatuous amendment has been debated for a very long time because Conservative Members have not wanted to debate matters of substance.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I understand that the Government's proposals have been made available to the electorate in a shortened form. Can the Minister tell the House the extent of the detail on the tax proposals and when he expects those will go through letter boxes?

Mr. McLeish: At this stage, I am afraid that I cannot give the response required, but I shall write and confirm those details.

We believe that our original wording is right. Tax-varying powers are a sufficiently important aspect of the Parliament's powers to warrant a separate question, but it is not necessary to specify every aspect of the powers in the questions. That is done by the White Paper. To add the word "income" would create a false sense of precision. The referendum in Scotland will seek consent for the Government's proposals for a Scottish Parliament with tax-varying powers. The people of Scotland understand well enough what they are asked without the amendment.

Miss McIntosh: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McLeish: I shall not give way at this point, but I shall give way to the hon. Lady in a minute.

It is important in this brief debate to look at schedule 1 to the original Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill to capture the fact that the questions must be seen in the context of the White Paper. I draw Opposition Members' attention to page 23 of the White Paper, from paragraph 7.11 onwards, which deals with tax-varying powers. Paragraph 7.12 says:

> "The Government propose that the tax varying power should operate on income tax, because it is broadly based and easy to administer. Income tax is relatively simple and easy to understand and has none of the difficulties associated with the other major tax bases: different rates of VAT on different sides of the border would cause practical problems and there would be specific difficulties with EU rules; corporation tax would place an unreasonable burden on companies operating in Scotland; National Insurance is inappropriate because of its direct link with the social security system; and council tax and non-domestic rates would over-burden the local government finance system and undermine the accountability of local government to its electorate."

I submit—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) should sometimes think before he opens his mouth. He should know that what we call

[Mr. McLeish]

"non-domestic rates" are business rates in Scotland. A trip up north may make him more familiar with the language that I am trying to use as part of this wider educational exercise this evening.

I submit that the questions on the ballot paper are linked to the White Paper. Naturally, the White Paper spells out in detail what we intend and do not intend. Referring back to the intervention by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), an objective summary will go to every household in Scotland and will cover his point.

Miss McIntosh: On the educational exercise, will the Minister inform the Scots of the tax implications if they lose the 19 per cent. advantage in public sector expenditure that they currently enjoy? Will that be put to the Scots in the referendum campaign? Income tax will have to increase substantially if they lose that tax advantage from the UK.

Mr. McLeish: The education issue is important. When we start to link the tax-varying power with the Barnett formula and the other assigned budget implications, a full discussion and debate on the White Paper are required, as well as an insight into the debate taking place in the Scottish press on the tax-varying power.

The crucial point is that no one will put a cross on the ballot paper on 11 September without knowing in detail the implications of the Government's policies. We think that that is right and it is what the Scottish people want. On 11 September, they will be able to exercise a choice.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend refers to an objective summary. Who is to decide whether it is objective? What is objective in the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) and in my view may be two entirely different things.

Mr. McLeish: Without getting lost in the tautology or the semantics of a definition of objectivity, I believe that we are trying to summarise the key elements of a substantial and well-received White Paper to ensure that, when people vote, they have the benefit of that exercise and the objectivity that we could bring to it.

I recognise the cynicism of those on the Conservative Opposition Benches; old habits die hard. We want to make certain that people understand what they are voting about. People must be able to choose between options. They will have a chance to say yes or no. That is an important element of the democracy that we are trying to bring to the referendum.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): Will the opportunity be taken in that objective exercise to present information that would knock aside the fallacy produced by the Conservatives that Scotland is subsidised, and set out some of the arguments advanced by the Treasury before the last general election, which showed that since 1979 Scotland had generated a budget surplus of £27 billion to the United Kingdom?

Mr. McLeish: I will not be drawn down that road so late in an evening. Suffice it to say that the hon. Gentleman's party will be part of a yes, yes campaign in Scotland. It is important to note that the Liberal Democrats will be involved in a yes, yes campaign north of the border. The Labour party will be involved in a yes, yes campaign. It is conspicuous that the Conservative party will not be represented. The think twice campaign—the no, no campaign—is merely a front, not for the Conservative voters of Scotland but for the out-of-touch Conservative leadership in the House, as has been ably demonstrated this evening by Conservative Front Benchers.

I have no difficulty in welcoming the fact that we will have a referendum. It is crucial that there are questions on the Parliament and on the tax-varying powers. We have conclusively linked the questions on the ballot paper to the White Paper, which contains substantial comment on the tax and answers the questions involved. I hope that the House will reject Lords amendment No. 2.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Once again, we have heard from the Minister a mixture of condescension and bluster. The one thing that we never get from him is an answer. I hope that he begins to learn that he is now a Minister. He should start behaving like a Minister, not like a member of the Opposition. He holds an extremely important ministry in the Scottish Office and he should be worthy of it. What we have heard from him tonight and in previous debates has been entirely unsatisfactory.

The Minister said something extraordinary. He said that the position was clear—it is all about income tax; there are no other taxes. He went on to say that the amendment would create a false sense of precision. What on earth does that mean? The one thing that the people of Scotland need before they vote in a referendum is a sense of precision.

At present, there is no sense of precision. If the amendment were allowed to stand, there would be the precision that the only tax that could be varied would be income tax. I know, as do my hon. Friends, why the Minister is not prepared to allow a false sense of precision. It would be false, because not only income tax is being spoken about.

Failure to accept the amendment confirms that there is a can of tax worms lying beneath the surface of the document, and the Minister hopes that when the people of Scotland find that out after the referendum, it will be too late. It is sleight of hand to pretend that the reference is only to income tax. There are back-of-the-hand taxes, indirect taxes and a vicarious tax.

I realise that the Minister considers it essential to keep that from the Scottish people before 11 September. I shall ask him one or two questions to demonstrate why I hold that view. If income tax is the only tax concerned, why will he not accept that description, which makes the position clear?

The Secretary of State said in his statement last Thursday:

> "Subject to the outcome of the referendum, the Scottish Parliament will be given power to increase or decrease the basic rate of income tax set by the UK Parliament by up to 3p."

Fair enough. He went on to say:

> "The Parliament will have a guaranteed right to raise or to forgo up to £450 million—index-linked—irrespective of changes in the UK income tax structure."—[*Official Report*, 24 July 1997; Vol. 298, c. 1043.]

What happens—this is the key question—if there is a change in the bands, which is not declared by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or a change in taxable income, as happens at boom times and at times of recession, when 3p would raise more or less than £450 million? If it raises less, from where will the extra money come to maintain the guarantee that a Scottish Parliament could raise up to £450 million, as the Secretary of State said?

If the limit is 3p in the pound and that 3p will not get £450 million, which is guaranteed, the money will come from somewhere else—not income tax. That is why the Minister is not prepared to have that descriptor in the Bill.

I shall ask the Minister straight and hope that, for once, he will answer straight: under the proposals, would the Scottish Parliament be able to raise new taxes—for example, by the introduction of a property tax, as is rumoured in some of the Scottish papers, or some other form of indirect taxation? Will the Minister categorically say yes or no?

Mr. McLeish: The answer is no. The Parliament will have no powers to do that.

7.45 pm

Mr. Ancram: We move on, then, to the next question. Does the White Paper's empowerment of a Scottish Parliament with control of local government expenditure, non-domestic rates and other local taxation allow restructuring of those forms of local taxation, or altering of the amounts that go to local government for those?

Would it be possible for a Scottish Parliament to decide to retain some of the revenue support grant to pay for its own programmes, possibly to make up for the shortfall in the £450 million, knowing that the effect would be to force councils to put up council taxes to meet it? If that power exists, does the Minister agree that that may not be a direct form of taxation, but that it is a back-door form of taxation? Would the Scottish Parliament be able to do that, or would something prevent it?

My hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) mentioned business rates or non-domestic rates. Is it within the power of the Scottish Parliament to restructure non-domestic rates in such a way that more taxation is borne by businesses in Scotland? In effect, the Parliament will have found a back-door means of raising revenue.

Mr. Hogg: As he is posing questions to the Minister, I ask my right hon. Friend to draw the Minister's attention to paragraph 7.26 on page 25 of the White Paper, which states:

> "The Scottish Parliament will be responsible for determining the form of local taxation . . . It will therefore be able to alter the form of the council tax, or replace it if it so decides."

That is a reference to the Scottish Parliament's power to introduce a variety of local taxes to replace the council tax. Unless we limit the schedule in the manner proposed in the other place, it could be treated as an authority for doing that.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for finding yet another indication in the White Paper that the Minister's initial assertion—that income tax is the only tax-varying power available to the Scottish Parliament—is incorrect. I hope that the Minister will face that fact.

Will the Minister also confirm whether the power to alter or restructure local government taxation would allow for the introduction of a local sales tax, for instance? Would that then allow a Scottish Parliament to hold back some of the non-domestic rates or revenue support grant to finance—again, through the back door—its own programmes in a way that is not possible through income tax? Will the Minister also explain what provision his income tax calculations make for the variations between pensioners—who apparently will have to pay income tax on their pensions in Scotland—and those who have savings or dividends and are not pensioners? What provision has been made to meet the variations that that could cause in the tax base?

In all seriousness, I urge the Minister to make a clear statement tonight. The Scottish people are already concerned about the prospect of having higher taxes than those in the rest of the United Kingdom. They already fear the disadvantage that they would experience in terms of business competitiveness and living standards. The Minister may disdainfully accuse us of not representing Scottish constituencies, but I have on-going Scottish connections and I visit Scotland. I know that people in Scotland fear the imposition of 3p on income tax—and their fear that there is a can of tax worms waiting to be opened is even greater. Everything that I have said tonight suggests that there is such a can of worms.

The Minister could calm the fear that other taxes are hidden within the foliage of the White Paper by accepting this simple amendment. If the Minister persists in rejecting the amendment, there can be only one interpretation, and it will strike fear in the hearts of Scottish taxpayers, whether direct or indirect. New taxes are the only possible explanation. Conservative Members are appalled by the crass proposition to have variable income taxation within the United Kingdom. We believe that that will work only to the disadvantage of Scotland—both businesses and individuals. We are even more appalled by the Government's covert agenda for further taxes.

The tartan tax is a body blow. The existence of a collection of clan tartan taxes, each more invidious than the other, would amount to a horrifying deception of the people of Scotland. We need to know what those taxes are. The only honourable way in which the Minister can deny the existence of such taxes is by withdrawing his disagreement with the Lords amendment and by clarifying that income tax will be the only tool available to the Scottish Parliament. If he does not take that opportunity tonight, we shall ensure that the people of Scotland are made aware of the can of tax worms that lies within the White Paper. We shall ensure that the canny people of Scotland—who are canny in every sense of the word—are not taken in easily by the deception perpetrated by the White Paper.

Mr. Dalyell: Leaving the worms metaphor aside, the measure is a Pandora's box of unintended consequences.

First, there is the "3 per cent. question". If more and more people, under Government policy, are removed entirely from tax liability, the burden of the 3 per cent. rate will be borne by a reducing percentage of the

[Mr. Dalyell]

population. The Scottish Parliament's spending plans would then be increasingly dependent upon decisions about tax rates taken in Westminster, over which it would have no control.

Secondly, there is the "who pays question". Will everyone domiciled in Scotland be affected? What are the consequences for Inland Revenue? Will tax officers at Bootle, Shipley, London and elsewhere have to sort out Scots tax from English tax, and what will be the costs of so doing? Is it feasible in a single United Kingdom administrative and fiscal region to have different tax rates applying to the earnings or investment incomes of different citizens according to where they live or work in the United Kingdom?

Thirdly, there is the "peripatetic question". Will there be a wholly arbitrary exemption for companies? What will be done about peripatetic business men—or Members of Parliament, for that matter—who spend more than half the year outside Scotland? We might not be caught by the residency rule but, if we escaped, one can imagine the howls of outrage.

Fourthly, what about English people who are on "temporary secondment" to Scotland for six months? Will they be treated as being resident for a whole tax year, and therefore subject to higher Scottish income tax?

Fifthly, there is then the "question of tax varying". Assuming that the Barnett formula will be retained, what will be the consequences for the financial arrangements between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom if the Scots decide to increase income tax by 3p in the pound? Will the United Kingdom Government be expected to put the same amount into Scotland as though the income tax were the same as in England and Wales? If the Scots decided to cut taxes, would English taxpayers be expected to make up the difference?

Sixthly, I have alluded to the "Chirnside question" before. I must save time. It raises the same issues as the Boston tea party.

Seventhly, there is also the question of tax investment. If devolution leads to a higher-cost economy in Scotland, we must make decisions that take account of that fact. Firms such as Scottish and Newcastle would be deeply affected by this. Whatever one thinks about the management of such firms, the fact is that they employ many of our constituents. If there is a choice to be made between investing in the north or just south of the border, that will become a factor. We are not talking about taking operations away from Scotland; the issue is one of new investment in Scotland and is mixed up with the problems of rotating staff between Scotland and England.

Eighthly, there is also the "company question". Will there be a wholly arbitrary exemption for companies? What are the implications of having two fiscal regimes within one economy? The effect of a uniquely Scottish tax would be serious. Mutual and life assurance companies are concerned that any additional Scottish tax could result in clients moving to English companies for fear of incurring extra taxation. If tax levels in Scotland were made higher and business regulations different on either side of an artificial border, the extra costs and hassle would drive enterprising Scots investment and jobs to the bigger markets and wider opportunities south of the border.

Ninethly, there is the very important "pensions question". Pensions are taxed as income, like wages and salaries. Does Scotland want a system that gives pensioners a financial incentive to retire to England? I have spent eight consecutive years considering Finance Bills. Anyone who has been in Committee Room 10 night after night will know that they are vital questions that must be answered pretty quickly.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Hon. Members may recall that I made it perfectly clear on Second Reading and in Committee that the Liberal Democrats were sceptical of, and opposed, the second question. However, the House voted for it, and we must consider the consequences of deciding the precise wording. Perhaps it does not matter over much, as I think that the Government have the balance of the argument. The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) pointed out, at the prompting of the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), that the Scottish Parliament could alter or replace the form of council tax and could devolve control of non-domestic rates to councils. That would be a tax-varying power in addition to its income tax power.

With regard to some of the points made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), it is made perfectly clear in the White Paper that the Government believe that income from dividends and savings should remain exempt from any income tax variation, so there would not be the kind of concerns that were being raised. The fact that there will be differences shows that, if one simply puts income tax on the ballot paper, it would give a misleading impression. People might think that all who are personally liable for income tax would be subject to the variation, whereas in fact only part of a person's income tax liability would be subject to the variation.

8 pm

Mr. Hogg: First, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on becoming a learned Gentleman. If the Government really mean to limit the question to income tax, why should not the Bill say so? Surely the meaning of a Bill should be clear on its face. I do not understand why, if it is the Government's intention that the question be limited to income tax, the Bill should not say just that.

Mr. Wallace: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his kind words.

I think that I said that the Scottish Parliament will have the power to vary local taxation. The power to vary income tax is the power to vary not the whole of income tax, but only one part of it. Part—income from dividends—will be excluded. Therefore, it could potentially be misleading. The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that it should be on the face of the Bill. We are talking about a ballot paper that will refer to the Government's proposals. I have already questioned the Minister about how far the abbreviated objective form of his proposals will go. If he heard the House today with regard to the tax-varying powers, he will have understood from the mood of the House that it must be full and complete. If that is what people are being asked to vote upon, it is important that, on that specific point, they are given a considerable amount of information.

I regret that the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) has left the Chamber. I did not mean to be ungallant towards her. She referred to an education process, but her very question betrayed the fact that her understanding of the Government's proposals which will be put in the referendum was limited, and that is why the education process is needed. She said that the Scottish people would have to face up to the fact that they would lose some expenditure advantage and that income tax rates would rise enormously. For a start, the White Paper makes it clear that the Barnett formula has been retained. It also puts a limit on the powers of the Scottish Parliament to vary taxation. Therefore, the very premises of her question were wrong. That is why she should acquaint herself with the terms of the White Paper.

Mrs. Laing: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way so gallantly. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) not being here, may I point out that the information that she was using came not from political sources but from the Scottish Law Society, which is a very fine body and well able to interpret what it sees in a White Paper? The confusion that the hon. Gentleman has highlighted would not exist if the Prime Minister had kept his promise to publish the Bill before the referendum.

Mr. Wallace: I think that my interpretation of the White Paper is better than that of the Law Society of Scotland, if that is what the Law Society of Scotland has said. I am sure that the Minister will confirm that when he replies to the debate.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Is not what the hon. Gentleman is describing the essential fraud of the second question, which is that, even if the second question is rejected by voters, any Scottish Parliament would still have tax-varying and raising powers?

Mr. Wallace: Inasmuch as it has powers with regard to local government taxation, the answer is yes. However, it ill becomes the architect of the poll tax to make such a point. The very man who stood at the Dispatch Box tonight and said how appalling it would be for Scotland to be out of line with the rest of the United Kingdom was the very man who imposed the poll tax upon Scotland a year ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom.

Let me keep this as simple as I can. The White Paper is there. A shortened version will be presented to the Scottish people. Let the Scottish people decide. I trust that they will decide yes.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): I intervene only briefly. I have to be brief anyway, given the guillotine. So far in this debate, for the past three hours, the only Scottish Back Bencher who has spoken has been my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I rise in part just to make it clear to the House that my hon. Friend does not represent the views of Labour Back Benchers. In fact, he is a bit of a loner in terms of his views on a Scottish Parliament.

I sometimes wonder whether my hon. Friend and I stood on the same election manifesto at the recent general election when we were committed to holding a two-question referendum. I am committed to a Scottish Parliament with tax-varying powers and I am here to argue for the manifesto on which both of us were elected. I only wish that he were here to do precisely that as well.

As the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said, it is the height of hypocrisy for Tory Members to come here and worry about back-handed, back-door taxes being imposed on the people of Scotland. During the past five to 10 years, Tory Governments have continually cut revenue support to local councils, forcing them to increase council tax as a back-door method of taxation. For the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) to accuse the Labour Government of trying to do that is unbelievable hypocrisy, particularly coming from the very man who argued that Scotland should pay higher taxes than anywhere in the United Kingdom when he introduced the poll tax legislation a year in advance of it being applied anywhere else in the United Kingdom. He did not worry about Scots paying higher taxes at that time.

Mr. Hogg *rose—*

Mr. McAllion: I am not giving way. There is no time. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has made several long speeches tonight and the Scottish people will be delighted if he has to button his lip for a change.

Earlier tonight, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow was complaining about the effect of the tax-varying powers on local government in Scotland. He complained about the unified business rate. He referred to the negative impact of the Scottish Parliament having control of the unified business rate on Scottish businesses in particular. I am a personal friend of my hon. Friend, but I must ask him in all sincerity whether he has any conception of how arrogant is that argument. He is saying that only this Parliament can possibly get it right when it comes to business taxes in Scotland; that any other Parliament elected by the Scottish people would, by definition, be inferior to this Parliament; that it could not come to the right decision about how the business rate should be applied in Scotland or about whether the council tax or a local income tax was the way in which to finance local government services. He is saying that we in Westminster are so superior that other Parliaments could not possibly get it right when we always get it right.

Any hon. Member who has been here for the past 10 or 20 years knows how many local government Bills have been forced through the House, almost every one of them destroying one aspect or another of local government; almost every one of them getting it wrong in one way or another.

I, as a Scot, would be delighted if control over local government finance were transferred back to Scotland and decided on by elected representatives of the Scottish people who live in Scotland all the time, who are much closer to Scottish businesses and who understand the Scottish dimension much more than people in this Chamber ever can.

My hon. Friend should start to realise that Scotland is a nation with national rights, which is every bit as good as any other part of the United Kingdom and can come to decisions that are in the interests of the Scottish people. *[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Member for Devizes had changed his views and joined us on the Labour Benches, he would still represent a English constituency rather than one in Scotland. His views will not be tolerated in Scotland. That is why he had to go to Devizes. The Edinburgh people threw him out a long time ago and they were right to do so.

The reality is that all the changes proposed by the Labour Government, both in terms of varying the rate of income tax and giving control over the finance of local

[Mr. McAllion]

government to Scotland, are well known to the Scottish people. The Scottish Constitutional Convention has been debating those issues for six years. It has widely publicised its views. There has been a huge debate in Scotland. Everyone in Scotland knows what the powers of a Scottish Parliament will be. They are in the White Paper that was published only last week. There will be a debate between now and the referendum, but everyone knows the kind of powers that will be given to the Scottish Parliament. It is hokum and bogus for the Opposition to—

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Supplemental Allocation of Time Order, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to the said Order.*

The House divided: Ayes 330, Noes 131.

Division No. 76] **[8.9 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard *(Shef'ld Hallam)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Thomas
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcast'e E)*
Burden, Richard
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
McLeish, Henry
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*

Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Webb, Professor Steve
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Wray, James
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. Graham Allen.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Malcolm Moss and
Mr. John Whittingdale.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos 7, 10, 15 and 16 disagreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put forthwith the Question in respect to the amendments designated by Madam Speaker,* That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendments.

Lords amendments Nos 11, 12, 13, 14, 17 and 18 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put forthwith the Question,* That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords amendments.

Lords amendments Nos. 3,4,8 and 9 agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put forthwith the Question on motions made by a Minister of the Crown,* That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendments.

Lords amendments Nos. 5 and 6 disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 6 agreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments to the Bill: Dr. Liam Fox, Mr. Peter Hain, Mr. Oliver Heald, Mr. John McFall and Mr. Henry McLeish (Chairman); Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Mr. McFall]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGE

Ordered,

That a Select Committee of seven Members be appointed to join with a Committee to be appointed by the Lords, as the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege, to review parliamentary privilege and make recommendations thereon;

That three be the Quorum of the Committee;

That the Committee shall have power to send for persons, papers and records; to sit notwithstanding any Adjournment of the House; to report from time to time; and to appoint specialist advisers to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's order of reference.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

MODERNISATION OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ordered,

That Sir Patrick Cormack be discharged from the Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons and Mr. Richard Shepherd be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Mr. Grieve: On a point of order, Sir Alan. We have been subject to a timetable motion this evening. I understand that the purpose of such a motion is to enable the House to transact its business within a time framework that allows full discussion. In the circumstances, is it not extraordinary that we are concluding at 8.25 pm a debate on major constitutional issues that are to be put to the people of Wales and Scotland? With a sensible timetable motion, we could have debated those issues for a further hour and 35 minutes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): We have been debating the issues on the basis of a timetable motion that was agreed by the House.

Closed Circuit Television

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

8.26 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I am glad to have the chance to debate this topic. It has particular significance for my constituency, but it also has national significance for hon. Members in all parties, given the successful spread and use of closed circuit television schemes over the past few years.

The purpose of the debate is to elicit guarantees from the Government on two specific issues that are extremely relevant to the future success of CCTV schemes and, most important, to their spread. First, there are the guidelines for applications. Towns and other localities that wanted CCTV schemes had become used to the competitions that were organised under the last Government, but there is now some doubt about how the Government intend to proceed with those applications.

Secondly, and perhaps even more important, is the question of money—whether the Government will commit enough to allow this extremely successful form of crime prevention and deterrence to continue in the current Parliament as it did in the last. I hope that if, by the end of this short debate, the Government have made those two commitments, we can all—as Madam Speaker put it earlier today—pack our buckets and spades in a much happier frame of mind.

Tenterden, in my constituency, is a small town, which is normally peaceful. There is a good deal of civic pride and community involvement in the town, which, in many respects, is the model of a small English market town, in which worries about crime are not at the forefront of people's minds. Nevertheless, over the past decade or so, fear of crime has increased markedly in Tenterden, and, I dare say, in many towns like it throughout the country. Shops in the high street have been ram-raided, local policemen have been injured in fairly serious attacks, and there is a general feeling, particularly among the elderly, that the place is not as safe as it used to be.

Therefore, the town council, in partnership with local bodies such as the police and the local business community, has decided to apply for CCTV to be installed in the town. The council applied last year, but for various reasons it did not succeed. It is trying again, and there is a new scheme on the table for 12 cameras to cover the most important parts of the town centre. The council thinks, and I agree, that that would have a dramatic effect on crime in Tenterden.

Not only is the town council trying again, but it is trying with a will. Over the past few weeks, while it has been trying to put together the town's contribution towards the cost of the scheme, it has received 400 pledges of money from individual citizens. In less than a month, it has raised £5,000, which is half the target for personal donations. The council has promised another £10,000, and Ashford borough council has promised £35,000. The town centre group, which is organising the scheme, is confident of raising £30,000 from the town's 200 businesses. The total cost of the scheme is about £250,000.

Some unease is being caused by lack of knowledge about the bidding guidelines, and the council would like to have that matter cleared up as soon as possible.

As I have said, the council is already in the successful throes of raising money, and it would be easier to do that if it knew the exact form in which the application should be made. I appeal to the Minister to give the people of Tenterden, and no doubt those in many other places, some certainty about that. I hope that the debate can be the means by which we can move forward on that.

The people of Tenterden and I are keen to move positively on the scheme. That is evident from what is happening on the Stanhope estate in Ashford in another part of my constituency. It has had many of the problems associated with inner-city areas. There have been problems with drugs, petty crime and vandalism. In many ways, Stanhope and Tenterden are different, but the people of Tenterden and other villages can see how effective CCTV can be in an area that has had much bigger problems with crime.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Alun Michael): I want to answer the debate as fully and as accurately as I can, but I am little puzzled. The hon. Gentleman spoke about applications from Tenterden, which I think he described as a village; perhaps it is a village—I am not sure of the exact description. I apologise for not knowing that, but the hon. Gentleman did not say that he would raise this specific topic. As far as I am aware, there has been no application from Tenterden. Perhaps he could clarify the issue, because it will be difficult to answer questions about applications if there have not been any.

Mr. Green: The town was included in a wider application by Ashford borough council. Tenterden is one of the Cinque ports, but its council is not a borough or district council. It has a town council because Tenterden has a proud history. I am surprised that the Minister knows nothing about the application, because I shall shortly quote from a letter that he sent to me on the subject.

CCTV is only part of a long-term policing initiative, and on the Stanhope estate its effects as part of a wider policing initiative are clear. Since 1993, when CCTV was introduced, recorded crime has gone down by 42 per cent., violent offences have gone down by 30 per cent., burglaries have gone down by 16 per cent., and car theft has fallen by 46 per cent. That is clear, hard evidence of the beneficial effects of that form of policing. It is not a panacea, but it helps, and, significantly, it is extremely cost effective.

There are many fixed CCTV schemes, and I hope that the Minister will agree that the next stage should be mobile schemes. My constituency, and no doubt many others, contain villages in which full-time, fixed CCTV would not be cost effective or worth while. However, specific crime hot spots would be well served by mobile systems, which could be prominently displayed as a deterrent or quietly installed to catch specific criminals.

The Minister spoke about being confused. In a letter to me dated 12 July he stated:

> "We are considering the future of CCTV Challenge Competitions as part of our review of existing expenditure programmes. A decision on whether there will be another round of the Competition—and if there is, what form it would take—will be made later in the summer."

It is now later in the summer, and I hope that the Minister can say when that decision will be made. The delay is slightly disheartening, because there is much evidence that many local authorities have succeeded in bids after failing the first time.

To broaden the issue from the problems in my constituency to the national picture, I should tell the House that so far there have been three competitions and that the Government have paid out more than £37 million. As a result, there are now more than 6,000 closed circuit cameras in operation, many of them doing extremely good work. I am aware that there have been some objections. In particular, it is said that CCTV infringes civil liberties and that rather than cutting crime it simply shifts it to areas that are not covered by cameras.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Perhaps I could draw my hon. Friend's attention to my constituency, which has two borough councils. Runnymede has a Conservative-controlled authority and Elmbridge is controlled by a coalition of Liberal Democrats and ratepayers.

Runnymede recently switched on a splendid CCTV scheme, which already makes a significant contribution to controlling local crime. Perhaps more importantly, it is making a significant contribution to people's perception of security as they go about their business in our town centres. By contrast, the libertarian argument to which my hon. Friend alludes has been used in Elmbridge to block progress on a scheme, and no bid was submitted to the Home Office.

My Elmbridge constituents look enviously at those in Runnymede, because of the success of the CCTV scheme there. Will my hon. Friend join me in urging authorities that have used this rather spurious libertarian argument as the basis for not applying for funds to overcome their scruples and become part of the vigorous progress towards CCTV being installed everywhere?

Mr. Green: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I have said that CCTV is a nationally important issue, and he confirms it. Plainly, some people misguidedly use the libertarian argument in opposing CCTV. In support of my case, I can do no better than quote John Stevens, the former chief constable of Northumbria:

> "The bottom line is that law-abiding residents have nothing to be afraid of, but criminals have plenty to worry about."

The fact that criminals have plenty to worry about brings more people on to the streets and increases freedom, especially for old people and women, who might otherwise be afraid on the street.

There is clear public support for the installation of security cameras. The chief constable of Dyfed-Powys, Raymond White, has said:

> "We are now seeing a clear public demand for this technology . . . the public find CCTV systems very reassuring, second in value only to a patrolling police officer."

There are genuine success stories. I have mentioned the one in my constituency, but, throughout the country, the figures show that CCTV is a successful form of crime prevention. In Newcastle, 6,200 fewer crimes were recorded in the first four years after CCTV was installed, and in Brentwood in Essex, police crime statistics for April to October 1994 show an overall reduction in crime

[Mr. Green]

of nearly 40 per cent. In Workington, crime was reduced by 50 per cent. from its level the year before, when the town did not have CCTV.

All those figures from different areas and different types of community show that CCTV is a cost-effective weapon in the fight against crime. As a result, the previous Government went into the election promising £75 million over the course of this Parliament for new CCTV schemes. Those schemes would have produced more than 10,000 new cameras, and they would have been funded through public-private partnerships. Central Government, local authorities, the police, businesses and individuals would all contribute, as they want to do in Tenterden.

That seems to me the ideal non-partisan scheme. It is widely agreed on both sides of the House. As this is an Adjournment debate, perhaps we can lower the normal temperature in the Chamber. [*Laughter.*] That is not difficult at the moment, with so few of us here. There are now many areas, especially those connected with law and order, in which there is some non-partisan consensus. Apart from all being against crime, we are now also all in favour of public-private partnerships, and of making every pound of public expenditure go as far as possible.

CCTV fulfils all those ideals. None the less, the Government have not yet committed themselves to maintaining the spending commitment set by the previous Government.

Mr. Michael: Nonsense.

Mr. Green: I do not understand why the Government have not done that. One does not need a review when a policy is working as well as CCTV. If the Minister is prepared to say this evening that they will now meet the spending commitments of the previous Government, I shall be the first to welcome that, and so will all the people who are looking forward to having it installed in their communities.

CCTV can help to restore the sense of community that used to prevent crime in small towns such as Tenterden. Social change now means that more people are out at work and fewer people are around. The old idea that there is always someone twitching the lace curtains to see whether there are any strangers in the road does not apply any more, and CCTV is the best substitute for that kind of gentle personal policing, which used to work.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) said, CCTV not only catches—it deters, too. No one but the most hardened or the dimmest of criminals would commit a crime if he thought he was on camera.

I should like two commitments from the Minister. First, I want him to say that he can move forward with proper guidelines to allow people to apply for the next few years, so that they know where they are, and can proceed with their applications. Secondly, I should like a commitment that the extra £75 million promised by the previous Government will be provided by the present Government.

If that does not happen, the anti-crime rhetoric of the Minister and his Front-Bench colleagues will be seen as no more than hot air. The previous Government put their money where their mouth was, and were tough on crime. I invite the new Government to do the same, and I look forward to the Minister's doing so now.

8.42 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Alun Michael): I was prepared to congratulate the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) on succeeding in obtaining the Adjournment debate and on raising the subject of closed circuit television. It is possible to have a constructive and sensible debate on that issue. For one or two sentences, the hon. Gentleman seemed to be asking for such a debate, but his request stood in stark contrast to the rather partisan nature of the rest of his contribution. As I listened to him, I wondered why he had asked for the debate, and the end of his speech I am left still wondering why he bothered. He did not seem to have much to say.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the previous Government's spending commitments on CCTV, had they won the general election. But there were no such commitments—only a last-minute attempt by the Conservative party during the run-up to the election to suggest that a Conservative Government would spend £75 million over the life of this Parliament. Moreover, the hon. Gentleman rightly characterised that promise when he said that it was not their own money that the Conservatives were promising to spend, but that of the other partners that they would draw in. That was a pretty empty promise, given that the previous Government had allowed for one further round for next year and nothing more during the forward planning for Home Office spending during the remainder of this Parliament.

The hon. Member said that he wanted to elicit guarantees from this Government, and he asked for commitments. I suggest to him that he should have used his influence as a prospective parliamentary candidate in a seat likely to remain Conservative—even in the event of a landslide such as we have experienced—to persuade the then Government to pursue the policies for which he is asking. The Conservatives neither planned nor gave the sort of guarantee he is seeking tonight. It is interesting that a Conservative is willing to stand up in opposition to call for something that the Conservatives in government were not prepared to provide.

The development of CCTV depends not just on the Government putting up money, but on commitments from different organisations. During the past few years, I have visited many constituencies—controlled by local authorities of all political persuasions—and I have seen a number of places where CCTV has been installed with great success. Those concerned have not waited for Government money. Many Labour authorities in particular have, in partnership with business and the police, put money into local areas to ensure that CCTV is used to prevent and reduce crime.

Early in my parliamentary career, I spent an evening in the centre of Cardiff with the police and saw the problems that they had in attempting to deal with disorder with a very thin blue line. Local councils readily agreed to allow the police access to the cameras they had installed, primarily for traffic purposes, so that the police could deploy their limited powers in the best places to alert themselves in advance to where things were going wrong. That system was added to over the years and is an example—among many—of a Labour authority recognising the problems of local people and trying to tackle them.

The hon. Member referred to a scheme costing some £250,000, although he amended his remarks to say that it is contained within a more general scheme. That may be why the scheme was not immediately recognisable and why the town to which he referred was not identifiable within the list that I had taken the trouble to brief myself on. If he had written to ask for guidelines and information on what we intended to do, we could have answered his questions. We are examining the situation, given the very limited nature of the financial commitment to CCTV that we inherited from the previous Government within a difficult financial situation.

We intend to target resources as effectively as possible. I wish to underline the fact that many CCTV cameras were installed not just as a result of a bidding process to the Government—important though that was—but because local authorities have taken initiatives. In my town of Penarth, local businesses and I approached local authorities and were succesful in the last bidding round. The initiative can come from the local Member of Parliament, the local authority or business.

The hon. Member referred to Northumbria and to the previous chief constable John Stevens, now a member of the inspectorate. During his leadership, positive partnerships were developed between the police and local authorities to target crime. By that reference, he gives me an opportunity to commend the fact that considerable improvements have occurred in Northumbria's crime figures as a result of the partnership approach. That is something that we intend to build upon during the coming years, both in terms of encouraging the police and local authorities into a partnership approach and within the provisions of the crime and disorder Bill.

The hon. Gentleman referred to civil liberties. I share the concern that sometimes there is all too readily seen the downside of CCTV. The question is not whether CCTV is a magic wand that can suddenly make crime disappear but how it, with other measures to tackle and prevent crime while increasing public confidence, will work effectively in any given area. The use of CCTV must be carefully integrated within the approach of the police, local authorities and general communities, including business communities, if it is to be effective.

I have seen some examples where CCTV has been introduced without adequate thought and planning, with the result that partners have not been brought together. These are instances where the system has been less effective than its full potential. In some instances, an area has been covered by CCTV without consideration being given to displacement and the need to pull things together.

There was an example where in one town centre the privately owned precinct had chosen not to opt into the system. The result was the generality of the town covered by CCTV—a system that the local authority had worked for and designed with the police—with a sort of black hole in the middle. That was the result of one of the partners being missing. That is worrying and we would encourage the strongest possible partnership with local authorities.

We must make every effort to avoid the displacement problems to which the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) referred. Public-private partnerships are basic. On that I could agree with the hon. Member for Ashford in his content if not his tone. I remind him that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister was one of the earliest proponents of effective public-private partnerships.

In my background in local government I saw the redevelopment of the centre of Cardiff, which transformed it into a thriving and effective city centre worthy of the capital of Wales. That ensued because local authorities and the private sector came together effectively. There are other such examples in many places.

The hon. Member for Ashford has raised an important issue albeit in a slightly muddled way. I know that the CCTV systems in his constituency are well regarded and that Ashford was one of the first beneficiaries of the Home Office's CCTV challenge competition. The town was successful in the initial competition and the main town centre system went live in 1995. The initiating partnership is an example of the good practice that we want to see developed in other areas.

The local authority, the police, local business, including retailers, and the South-Kent hospital trust were fully involved. The good work bore fruit immediately. In the first year, there was a 20 per cent. reduction in thefts from motor vehicles, a 28 per cent. reductions in thefts of motor vehicles and a 13 per cent. reduction in assaults. I understand that recently the local police reported a 30 per cent. reduction overall in crime in Ashford town centre and a 42 per cent. reduction within a local housing estate. The police consider that these reductions are at least partly attributable to the introduction of CCTV.

Ashford is not unique in these respects, although it is unique in being represented by the hon. Gentleman, but all towns have to have something to make them unique. Many towns and cities throughout the country have seen reductions in crime, and sometimes large ones, as a result of CCTV systems being properly installed, planned and integrated within a partnership approach. I emphasise that CCTV is not a magic wand or a panacea. However, to respond to the point made by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge in an intervention, it is popular.

The advantages of CCTV, properly managed, speak for themselves: crime prevention, the deterrent effect of knowing that there is observation, the alerting of police at an early stage to stop dangerous situations escalating, the operational assistance to the police in sizing up a situation, the safer convictions that can be obtained—the savings in court time can be enormous—and, above all, the fact that people's confidence is renewed, which has led to many town centres being revitalised. Vulnerable groups in particular feel the advantage.

In the minutes before the bomb exploded in Manchester, the police were greatly assisted by traffic cameras which allowed them to see at a glance where the public were, so the evacuation of the city centre could be centrally directed and people could be moved out of the area quickly and efficiently.

I also agree with the hon. Member for Ashford that mobile cameras can be useful, if deployed with care, not as a magic wand but as part of a well-targeted approach. I presented awards to special constables recently. One of them was to special constables in the Weymouth area, where CCTV images had been shown to parents to let them know what their children had been up to, which is

[Mr. Alun Michael]

again a useful form of evidence and can discourage youngsters from taking part in illegal activities. Often, parents find it difficult to believe what youngsters are up to, so the evidence can help.

CCTV has a great deal going for it. On civil liberties and codes of practice, the previous Government rightly set as a condition for a CCTV grant that there would need to be a code of conduct. There is a need for a code of conduct to underpin all use of CCTV. There have been a few examples of abuse, such as the discredited video, "Caught in the Act", which caused immense public anger. I am happy to reinforce the message expressed by hon. Members of all parties at that time: CCTV images should be used only for crime prevention and reduction and as evidence; they should not be used for entertainment or titillation, as we do not want public confidence to be undermined.

A couple of years ago, I launched the local government information unit's publication, "CCTV—A Watching Brief", which was designed to help the development of suitable codes of practice. Where such codes have been adopted, they have operated well. In the longer term, we are considering a statutory underpinning to ensure that a few cowboys misusing the available film do not undermine public confidence.

I stress that, as I said in the letter to which the hon. Member for Ashford referred, we are reviewing existing expenditure programmes and reassessing priorities to ensure that the best use is made of the available resources. In response to a question from the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), I said:

> "It is only sensible for an incoming Government to undertake a comprehensive review of expenditure and of the way in which resources are used. It is in that context that we are examining how we use the money available for CCTV."—[*Official Report*, 7 July 1997; Vol. 297, c. 605.]

I was referring to the money set aside by the previous Government for CCTV in 1998–99.

I ask the hon. Gentleman to bear in mind the fact that the previous Government made provision only for 1998–99. They made none for the years after that, despite the extravagance of their promises and claims during the general election campaign. It is amazing how a general election concentrates the minds of the sort of Governments that we have had for the past 18 years.

Mr. Green: For all that the Minister says that the money was only there for 1998–99, am I right in believing that he is giving no guarantee that that money will still be there in 1998–99?

Mr. Michael: I am saying exactly what I have said to the hon. Gentleman previously—that we are undertaking a comprehensive expenditure review and considering the best use of the resources available. The Conservative Government failed to make provision for the extravagant promises that they made in the build-up to the general election. He is now a Back-Bench Member of a party which lost the election by making extravagant promises when it was too late. Despite the rhetoric of the Conservative party about its commitment to CCTV, it made no provision in government for CCTV after next year.

My aim is to achieve our commitment to tackle crime and its causes comprehensively. We have to do that within the resources that have been left to us. We shall do it in a way that is in the best interests of the country as a whole. I shall not make any further commitments at this stage other than to say, as I have said before to the House, and as the hon. Gentleman quoted me in a letter as saying, that I shall announce my decision on the future of CCTV funding later in the summer.

Even if we had the money that was promised during the general election campaign by the Conservative party, but not by the Conservative Government, it would not meet the demand for CCTV across the country from the public and others. There is a responsibility in local areas for local bodies—that means everyone, certainly the police and the local authority as well as the local community, including the local business community—to consider what can be done to contain, prevent and reduce crime. Where CCTV is needed as part of a comprehensive package to meet the needs of an area, the possibility of government assistance will be dealt with when we make the announcement that I have promised in a parliamentary answer and in my letter to the hon. Gentleman.

There certainly will not be enough money to provide all the schemes that imagination and need could project. That was certainly the case under the previous Government, because many schemes were not funded, although many went ahead because the local authority and the community moved things forward. So it would not be sensible for any area to depend on the possibility of Government money.

If there is a further bidding round, we shall consider applications objectively and as carefully as possible. Our announcement will suggest the ground rules and we shall answer the detailed questions on which the hon. Gentleman said that he would like guidance. We shall make the position clear when we make a statement about the way forward, but that should not be the be-all and end-all. It should not be the end of consideration of how to meet the problems of crime in a local area. Nor should the possibility that Government money is available to help. Government money will not meet the whole of the bill in any event.

Questions about whether Government money will be available to help in a particular area should not discourage local authorities from considering how they can use CCTV and other tried and proved methods in a properly integrated way to deal with the specific crime problems of the area.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 31 July 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Utilities Standing Charges

1. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received from consumer organisations about standing charges. [10026]

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Nigel Griffiths): It is sad that, when the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) made his debut appearance at the Dispatch Box as a shadow Cabinet member, for the first time in memory no one rose to congratulate him, even on his own side. Let me therefore wish him the same success in his present job as he had in his previous jobs.

With regard to standing charges, although my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has not yet received formal representations from consumer organisations, a number of hon. Members have conveyed constituents' concerns about this issue.

Mr. Heppell: I am sure that the Minister agrees that the reductions in VAT on gas and electricity, and the announcement about changes to the gas levy, will effectively mean a vast reduction in bills for British families. Will he confirm, however, that the review that the President of the Board of Trade announced on 30 June, in relation to the regulation of the privatised utilities, will take into account the needs of the poorest consumers?

Mr. Griffiths: Yes. As my right hon. Friend stressed, the review will embrace all the concerns affecting consumers, including poorer consumers.

Computers (Century Date Change)

2. **Mr. Singh:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action her Department is taking in respect of the millennium compliance of computers. [10027]

The Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The Department of Trade and Industry regards this as a very serious issue and is taking action in two areas. First, it is encouraging companies to note the implications of the date change and to make suitable preparations. The DTI helped the information technology industry to set up task force 2000, which is working vigorously to raise awareness of the issue. I recently hosted the IT skills summit, when I warned of the potential shortage of skilled resources to tackle the problem and called for the industry to report to me on fresh initiatives by September.

The Department has also established a programme of activities to ensure that its own IT systems continue to operate properly up to and through the millennium date change.

Mr. Singh: I thank the Minister for her reply. Does she agree that the previous Government did too little too late on this issue and that as a result of that inaction many firms are totally unprepared for the disaster facing them in terms of the year 2000 time bomb?

Mrs. Roche: I am very pleased indeed that my hon. Friend has drawn attention to this problem. It is a serious problem for companies both large and small. There will be serious implications even for companies that have adapted and made sure that changes are in progress if they are not sure that other—perhaps smaller—companies with which they deal have also changed.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Minister would do well to recognise that the previous Government did flag up this problem. At that time, much of industry was unaware of the issue and many companies have done too little about it, which means that some of them will go out of business because it is almost too late. The crisis will come well before 2000 because of the very supply chain measures that the Minister mentioned. Will she confirm that the Government's target for adapting their own system, the dates for which were set by the previous Government—October this year for a full audit and December 1998 for full systems adaptation—will still be met, and can she give an indication of the cost?

Mrs. Roche: I can certainly confirm that the measures that were undertaken will continue to be undertaken because they are extremely important, and I am happy to acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's contribution in relation to this issue. However, there is no room for complacency, because one of the great problems is the tremendous shortage of the specific skills needed to ensure that the problem is dealt with.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: Is my hon. Friend aware that many retailers are selling computers that are alleged to be millennium compliant, whereas independent checks have shown that they are not? Is she further aware that many of the software programmes being offered to check on millennium compliance are also faulty? Does she have any plans to check those allegations?

Mrs. Roche: Again, this is an important issue. The difficulty, as I am sure the House will be aware, is that the definition of what is compliant is very complex, and system performance depends on the interaction of different elements and how systems are used. I would urge industry to make the position as clear as possible to customers, and the Department will continue to do just that.

Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe

3. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representation she has received about the shareholdings of the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe. [10028]

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): None, other than from a few hon. Members on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Clappison: To clarify what has been going on, will the President of the Board of Trade say when senior officials and Ministers in her Department were notified not to raise with the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe, the noble Lord Simon, any matters which it is said have a bearing on BP? When was that notification given?

Mrs. Beckett: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman means by "that notification". It has been evident from the day of the Minister's appointment that he was clear about the matter, that the permanent secretary was clear about the matter, and that the Department was clear about the matter—that he would not and could not deal with matters directly affecting the company that he had just ceased to chair.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not of interest that the Prime Minister's challenge yesterday to Conservative Members to make these allegations outside has not been taken up? We can understand the reason for that. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we require no lectures about sleaze or standards in public life from a party which in government gave peerages and knighthoods to heads of companies that contributed most to the Tory party funds? Was not the sleaze in which the Tory Government were involved during 18 years so disgraceful that people in this country are not likely to forget it for a long time to come?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The Conservative party was dishonest and incompetent in government, and the campaign that it is running against my noble Friend suggests that it intends to continue in exactly the same way in opposition.

Mr. Harvey: Will the President of the Board of Trade acknowledge that, although the noble Lord Simon may indeed have broken no regulation, and must certainly still be regarded as a BP insider, knowing of all its commercial intentions for the next couple of years, it would surely help to ease any public perception of a conflict of interest if he were to divest himself of some of his ministerial responsibilities, as other Ministers have done in the past?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman would be right were it not for the fact that that is exactly what my noble Friend has done. There is no question of his dealing with issues that are directly about BP, and he has not done so from the day of his appointment. It is not true that he has, as Opposition Back Benchers are saying. That is totally untrue, as the Cabinet Secretary has confirmed. Obviously, my noble Friend cannot deal either with issues that could potentially give the company that he used to chair a competitive advantage. The steps that he has taken to ensure that there is no conflict of interest are absolutely parallel to those taken by Ministers in previous Governments, particularly Conservative Governments.

Mr. Redwood: After all the contradictions, all the different stories, will the right hon. Lady now answer some simple factual questions for a change? Will she tell the House when she first knew that the Minister planned to keep his holdings in BP and other companies? When did she first know that there had been a very long delay in putting the non-BP shareholdings into a blind trust? When were all Ministers and officials in the Department properly notified, in writing, that anything with a bearing on BP must not be discussed with that Minister? Until the right hon. Lady can answer those points, the questions will continue and there will be suspicions.

Mrs. Beckett: We have answered some 58 nit-picking questions from Conservative Members on the subject. I have just explained that it was plain from the day of my noble Friend's appointment that he would not be able to deal, and would not deal, with matters which relate directly to BP or in which BP has a competitive advantage. That is all quite clear.

As for the string of questions that Conservative Members have been asking, they are attacking my noble Friend for having shares in the company that he once chaired which are not in a trust; they are attacking him for having shares which are in a trust; they are attacking him for breaking the rules of the House, although he has not; and they are attacking him for not breaking the law of the land. What Conservative Members really resent is that he is a brilliant international business man who has taken up a post in a Labour Government for no pay, which is not of course the standard to which they are accustomed.

Mr. Redwood: Having failed to answer those questions, will the right hon. Lady now answer this much easier question? Does she agree with the Minister for Trade in the other place that Jersey trusts are an excellent way of holding shares and not paying capital gains tax; or does she agree with the Chancellor of the Exchequer that this is the kind of loophole that should be stopped because he does not like such loopholes helping rich companies and rich individuals?

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman ought to be aware that a range of different issues can be described under the heading of trusts, many of which are held in Jersey. It is not true, as he and some of his hon. Friends have attempted to imply, that the trust in which my noble Friend, with others, has some shares held is a trust which avoids tax. [HON. MEMBERS: "Keep going."] I am happy to keep going, because the right hon. Gentleman needs to know the facts.

The shares to which references are being made are held in a trust; they are not in fact available to my noble Friend at present or to anyone who has shares in that trust, which is for many BP employees, so at present they are not liable to tax, any more than an individual who is promised a pay rise by his employer pays tax when he is promised it. When the shares are released and go into the ownership of my noble Friend, they will be liable to tax and it will be paid. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will withdraw the totally unwarranted slur that he has made about this matter.

Scientific Advice

4. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will disseminate best practice to Government Departments in respect of the use of scientific advice. [10029]

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): Most would agree that in the past there has been a lack of co-ordination throughout Government. Science and policy making need to be co-ordinated. The Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Robert May, issued guidelines in March this year on best practice for Government in respect of the use of scientific advice and copies are available in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Mahon: Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the studies into Gulf war syndrome recently announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence? Does he agree that the previous Tory Administration totally failed Gulf war veterans by not seeking scientific advice when the problems emerged?

Mr. Battle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I seem to recall that she raised the matter many times in opposition, and I am glad that her persistence has paid off in Government policy now. Most will welcome the studies announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. The Ministry of Defence has now set in train two large-scale epidemiological studies. The researchers were selected following a scientific review by a panel convened by the Medical Research Council. The results will be made public—that is important—at the earliest opportunity, again subject to the usual review process.

The funding of new research into the possible health effects of the combination of vaccine and tablets given to troops in the Gulf to protect them against the effects of biological and chemical warfare has recently been announced. I hope that that work will prove to be a practical test case of the working of the guidelines.

Mr. Bercow: As the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe will receive scientific advice which is relevant to trade, to competitiveness and to the energy industries, when did the Minister first know that the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe had retained his BP shareholding, that he had nevertheless signed a Brussels blueprint for gas liberalisation and common energy taxation, and that he had exploited, and continues to exploit, a tax loophole which the Government of which he is—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's first point was reasonable, as it related to the question. However, he strayed quite a bit after that. It would be nice if the Minister could refer to scientific advice.

Mr. Battle: I wonder whether the Opposition would recognise scientific advice if they saw it, given their inability to understand the Order Paper. I was well aware, as were most people, where my noble Friend Lord Simon came from. I suspect that that is why Opposition Members so deeply resent his appointment.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: The Government are receiving scientific advice following recent revelations about radioactive dumping around the coast of Scotland. Does the Minister believe that a public inquiry should be held to allow full public scrutiny of that advice?

Mr. Battle: The National Radiological Protection Board and the nuclear inspectorate are taking seriously the allegations about the findings on the coast of northern Scotland. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the information should be made publicly available.

Mr. Baker: To follow the point raised by the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), does the Minister agree that, in taking the best scientific advice, he must apply the precautionary principle and make sure that the environment and individuals are not damaged as a result of Government decisions? In those circumstances, why are the new Government not proposing to ban organophosphates in view of the substantial worries about those chemicals and the fact that when in opposition they suggested that they would do so?

Mr. Battle: The good thing about science is that it enables Members to ask questions on such a wide range of subjects. This question has been put to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the hon. Gentleman received a response with which I concur. We intend to ensure that there is co-ordination of scientific advice throughout the Government. That is the difference between ourselves and the previous Administration. We cannot put Rome right in a day, but we have taken up the issues and started to tackle them. The previous Government swept them under the carpet.

Mrs. Gillan: Can we now have a straight answer from the Minister? Given that high-level Government scientific advice must have been made available to any Minister signing a document on the single market action plan, which covered gas liberalisation and common energy taxation, will the Minister tell us what scientific advice Lord Simon has had access to and if it has had a bearing on any oil, gas, chemical or other matters which have a bearing on BP? We want a straight answer now.

Mr. Battle: The straight answer is that the Conservative party is grubbing around trying to find any means that it can to undermine the integrity of my noble Friend. As the hon. Lady well knows, scientific advice is given across a range of matters in government all the time. Her question is not about scientific advice—she is trying to find a hook on which to hang her scurrilous attack on an honourable member of the Government.

Higher Education

5. **Mr. Dawson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to develop links between higher education and the business community in order to aid investment, assist development and create jobs; and if she will make a statement. [10030]

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian McCartney): My Department is active in fostering links between higher education and business by encouraging partnerships in areas of strategic research and through programmes, such as the teaching company scheme introduced in 1975 under the last Labour Government to encourage undergraduates and graduates to work on short and medium-term projects in companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises.

The results of a recent review of the teaching company scheme are being announced today and I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer given today by my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Industry and Energy to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer).

Mr. Dawson: Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that Lancaster university in my constituency is a world-class centre of research excellence? Does he agree that the Government have a major job on their hands in channelling research excellence towards practical business use, given the utter failure of the previous Government? Would my hon. Friend be prepared to assist me in my task by coming with me to talk to the local authority, the university and the local business community, which are keen to pursue business uses and research excellence?

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend is right to point out that Lancaster university is one of the leading universities in Britain in terms of the quality of its teaching and research. I am more than happy—as, I imagine, are my colleagues at the Department for Education and Employment—to support initiatives taken by Lancaster and other universities in promoting the Government's policies on excellence.

My hon. Friend is also right to point out that it was the last Government who cut the budget by more than 30 per cent. The present Government are committed to educational research and development. The last Government did not see it as a priority; we do.

Mrs. May: What on earth has happened to the Government's plans for internet and computer links in every education establishment? Has the regulator told the Government that their much-vaunted deal with BT cannot be done?

Mr. McCartney: This Government have done more in the past 12 weeks to invest in skills and technology than the previous Government did in 18 years. The hon. Lady should watch this space. The present Government, unlike their predecessor, are committed to such investment, and will invest.

Science, Engineering and Technology (Women)

6. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to promote science, engineering and technology careers for women. [10031]

Mr. Battle: There is a massive under-representation of women in science, engineering and technology, especially in senior positions in universities and companies. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has made it clear that she will work to dispel the common perception that science, engineering and technology are career options for men only. We are pursuing that objective through the Department's development unit on women in science, engineering and technology, which is within the Office of Science and Technology.

Dr. Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for taking the situation seriously. May I draw his attention to a recent peer group review in Sweden which showed that women scientists applying for research grants had to be two and a half times as productive as men to achieve the same peer group rating? Does my hon. Friend agree that that is shocking, and will he undertake similar research to find out what the position is in this country?

Mr. Battle: Yes, I will, in the light of that information. It is interesting to note that, although only 13 per cent. of engineering degree students are women, in Britain women perform better on their courses and obtain better degrees than men. I will put that information together with the research that we need to carry out. We want to ensure that many more young women take science and engineering seriously and see it as a positive career option.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Would not the resignation of Lord Simon be a good idea, as it would create an opportunity for a career move for a woman Labour Member of Parliament, who would be able to do the whole job—including dealing with matters relating to BP?

Mr. Battle: When I sat down after answering the main question, I thought that the only way in which hon. Members could relate it to my noble Friend Lord Simon was by doing a bit of gender bending—and that is what has happened. I think that occasionally we ought to acknowledge that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is herself—[HON. MEMBERS: "A woman."]—a scientist. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The Minister said "a scientist".

Beer Measures

7. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action her Department is taking to ensure that beer drinkers receive full liquid pints in public houses. [10032]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Government support the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), which will ensure that beer drinkers get the full liquid pint.

Mr. Campbell: Is not the real reason to do with profits for the brewers? Is there not a £9 profit on every keg that is brewed, which means excess profits for the breweries? Although we are new Labour, we are not really against profits—*[Interruption.]*—but does the Minister agree that excess profits at the expense of the consumer are wrong?

Mr. Griffiths: I am not a prophet, but I agree with my hon. Friend. His point has been made to me by publicans who run breweries. It is important to take account of the matter, and that is one of the reasons why we are determined to support my hon. Friend's Bill.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My question has nothing to do with the drinking habits of Lord Simon.

Madam Speaker: That is a nice change.

Mr. Winterton: It is important that drinkers get a full pint of beer, and the Minister will agree that the United Kingdom's traditional beer is of high quality. Does he also agree that it is important for people to be able to enjoy the traditions of English public houses and that the traditional names of public houses should be retained?

Mr. Griffiths: I strongly support the hon. Gentleman.

Motor Vehicles (Recycling)

8. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans her Department has to encourage the recycling of motor vehicles. [10033]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: My encouragement has been very positive, and on 15 July I participated in a signing ceremony with key representatives of the motor trade and car recyclers who aim to ensure that 95 per cent. of car parts are recycled by the year 2015.

Mr. Bennett: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I am sure he appreciates that the issue is much more complex that the matter of recycling parliamentary questions or press releases. Many car breakers already do an excellent job in making sure that many parts are reused. Much of the metal from cars is recycled. Does the Minister agree, however, that the more we keep old cars in use rather than replacing them with new ones, the more we keep old technology, which leads to high fuel use and volatile organic compounds emissions?

Mr. Griffiths: My hon. Friend is right: about 75 per cent. of old cars are recycled. He brings to the House his vast experience as the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment, and I am sure that he and his colleagues have carefully considered the issue.

Mr. Letwin: Does the Minister not think that the Department of Trade and Industry might be better advised to produce plans for recycling certain Ministers rather than cars?

Mr. Griffiths: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that that was very witty indeed.

Small Businesses (Interest on Debt)

9. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received from small business organisations in favour of a statutory right to interest on outstanding debts. [10034]

Mrs. Roche: I have met a range of business organisations representing all sizes and types of business and I have received many letters in support of the proposed legislation.

Mr. Spring: Is the hon. Lady aware that small business organisations—eight out of nine—strongly oppose statutory interest? The consultation process shows that small businesses are most anxious not about statutory interest, which the hon. Lady highlights, but about the return to local control of business rates, which in the 1980s under Labour local authorities drove many small businesses into bankruptcy.

Mrs. Roche: I am astounded by the second part of the hon. Gentleman's reply. *[Interruption.]* It was his reply to my response. Opposition Members should listen more carefully. The previous Administration's system of business rates was widely loathed by the business community. That was said during its own consultation process. The statutory right to interest is supported by 80 per cent. of businesses and by some Conservative Members, including the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). I am delighted to announce that all small business organisations support our proposals to tackle late payment.

Mr. Olner: Small businesses in my constituency are very pleased that the Government are at last taking action to ensure that other companies pay them their moneys. The previous Administration walked away from the problem and did not look at it at all—because, I assume, the then Deputy Prime Minister made his money by advocating that those firms did not pay money to smaller firms. We welcome the measure, and I urge the Minister to press forward with it as soon as possible.

Mrs. Roche: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As I said in answer to the previous question, all the small business organisations have joined us in a year-long campaign to deal with the problems of late payment. One of the measures that the Government will be introducing is the statutory right to interest. We are consulting on the best way forward and looking forward to the responses. Unlike the previous Government, we know that we need to do something about the problem.

Mr. Fallon: Does the Minister not realise that, this autumn, businesses already face a wave of new legislation, including that on the minimum wage, paternity leave, union recognition and works councils, and that the last thing that small businesses want is to be encouraged to sue their customers? If legitimising late payment in this way is such a good idea, why does she think that, on Tuesday, *The Independent* described her plan as

"smelling of legislation for legislation's sake"?

Mrs. Roche: Clearly, the hon. Gentleman has not read all the responses to the proposal. Nor does it appear that he has at all read the Green Paper, which is surprising considering that it came out on Monday, but let me put him out of his misery and tell him that, rather than imposing any burden on small businesses, it gives them a choice. I thought that that was what the previous Administration were all about.

Mr. Breed: Will the Minister accept that, although the statutory right to interest on late payment is one way of tackling this endemic problem, consideration should also be given to requiring companies, particularly public companies, to publish in their accounts the degree of their late payment—through 30, 60, and 90 days—in an effort to expose those larger companies that continue to ensure that they do not pay their bills on time?

Mrs. Roche: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and that is one of the matters that we are discussing with the small business organisations that have come together with us. I am delighted to announce that we shall consider publication with the private sector of such league tables, and we have discussed the matter with the Federation of Small Businesses.

Small Businesses (Information Technology)

11. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what her Department's policy is towards improving access to information technology for small and medium businesses. [10036]

Mrs. Roche: Many recent studies have emphasised the importance of new technologies to the competitiveness of smaller firms. Many people—in Government, in business support organisations and in the private sector—have a role in getting that message across. Within Government, we are pressing ahead with our support for the information society initiative programme for business, which places particular emphasis on offering access and awareness opportunities for small and medium enterprises at locations throughout the UK.

Dr. Gibson: Clearly, the Government are progressing many information technology initiatives, which will benefit small and medium businesses, including the Budget's doubling of tax credits for capital investment. What does the Minister make of a small business that, on its web site, admits to managerial disputes and the loss of confidence of its shareholders and of its public, a business whose managing director directs his market research from the back of a taxi in Newcastle airport? It is recorded on the web that that business is the Conservative party.

Mrs. Roche: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing that matter to my attention, but, in the end-of-term spirit, perhaps it is not my role to intrude on private and deep personal grief.

Mr. Paterson: If the Government wish to improve information technology in small and medium businesses, would it not be a good idea if Ministers visited businesses? According to a written answer from the President of the Board of Trade, as of 23 July, in nearly three months in government, three of her Ministers—one of whom was the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe—had not visited a single business. That is a disgrace.

Mrs. Roche: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is new to the House, but he really must get his facts correct. What is true is that the Conservative party cannot stand the fact that the Labour Government have the confidence of the business community, which the previous Government had lost totally.

Regional Aid

12. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement about the Government policy on the future of European aid to regions of high unemployment in the United Kingdom [10037]

Mrs. Beckett: As part of its package on EU enlargement and Agenda 2000, the European Commission has published proposals for reform of the structural funds. The Government will be working to ensure that the detailed arrangements for the funds take due account of the United Kingdom's disadvantaged regions, including those with high unemployment.

Mr. Beith: Does the President of the Board of Trade recognise that serious unemployment remains a desperate problem in areas of older industries such as the coal mining industry in Northumberland, and that therefore objective 2A remains extremely important to the United Kingdom? Is she finding that the case that we hope that she is putting forward is being undermined by the use of the discredited claimant count, which dates from the previous Government and which does not give an accurate picture, comparable to that used by other countries, of the level of unemployment in such areas?

Mrs. Beckett: We share with the right hon. Gentleman the view that it is important that proper account is taken of high levels of unemployment and that those levels should be accurately and consistently measured across international boundaries. One of the things that we are urging on the Commission is the use of internationally comparable statistics, not the discredited statistics produced by the previous Government.

Mr. Gunnell: One of the ways in which the Department of Trade and Industry helps areas of high unemployment is through regional selective assistance. What plans does my right hon. Friend have to review the map of regions to ensure that regional selective assistance goes to those areas which most need it?

Mrs. Beckett: I know of my hon. Friend's long record of concern about and interest in those issues. The matter must be considered not just across the United Kingdom but across Europe as the reform of structural funds is considered. We shall be looking at those matters, but we are very much at the beginning of that review process now.

Mr. Forth: If the right hon. Lady believes that aid from Europe can reduce unemployment at all, would that not show that the great bulk of aid should come to London, which, regrettably, now has a much higher unemployment rate than many other regions of the United Kingdom?

Mrs. Beckett: We are bound by the criteria which existed under the previous Government, within which aid does flow to some parts of the United Kingdom. However, as I said earlier, we shall be looking at what is happening in the south—in London and elsewhere—in the proposed review.

Mr. Reed: I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that Leicestershire is one of the most textile-dependent counties in Britain and throughout the European Union. Is she also aware that Leicestershire did not receive Retex funding under the Community initiatives programme during the 1980s and 1990s because it did not have objective 2 status? Will my right hon. Friend assure me that, during the consultation period up to 2000, the existing Community initiatives such as Retex and RECHAR will be maintained to ensure that places such as Leicestershire, particularly Loughborough, benefit from European Union assistance?

Mrs. Beckett: As my hon. Friend will know, we do not wish to see the type of changes that would pre-empt any results from the long-term and fundamental review. We are anxious to ensure that, under this review, across Europe and particularly in the United Kingdom, we receive fair treatment for different areas. I understand and sympathise with the points made by my hon. Friend about the impact on areas such as his own which has been affected by textiles. I am sure that my hon. Friend will recognise that one thing we do have going for us is that at least we now have a Government who are prepared to speak up for Britain in Europe.

13. **Mr. Andrew George:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement about her Department's efforts to secure EU objective 1 status for the UK's poorest regions. [10038]

Mrs. Beckett: The Commission's Agenda 2000 package includes proposals to reform the structural funds after 1999. The Commission will now need to make detailed legislative proposals, which will then have to be negotiated and agreed. The Government will then put forward those United Kingdom areas that meet the prescribed criteria.

Mr. George: I thank the right hon. Lady for her reply. Does she acknowledge that Cornwall has a high level of unemployment, the lowest wages in the country and the lowest gross domestic product per head? If so, will she give Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly top priority in her negotiations with the European Union so as to secure objective 1 funds for those regions?

Mrs. Beckett: We shall do everything we can to assist, and to press the case for all eligible regions. I very much welcome the implications of the Commission's proposals and review, which are to simplify the administration and contain costs. We believe that that will release more funds for worthwhile projects.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is there not a real need for the European Commission to undertake a revaluation of all indices that it takes into account when deciding not only objective 1, but objective 2 support? In reality, when looking at individual areas throughout the European Union—not just the UK, but countries such as Italy and France—can we not clearly and rapidly identify mistakes in the way that the work is being carried out? Those mistakes are being carried forward to the Commission's decisions on the allocation of funds to individual regions. It is a matter of ever-increasing concern to hon. Members.

Mrs. Beckett: I am very well aware of the many occasions on which my hon. Friend has raised those issues and expressed concern, especially on behalf of his constituents and his locality. I share his view that it would be wrong for any mistakes in the existing regime to be carried forward into future decisions. We are consistently pressing the Commission to ensure that there is a thorough statistical and geographical basis for any decisions that underlie the scheme. It is partly for that reason that there is a fundamental review, and we shall continue to press those matters.

Miss McIntosh: Does the right hon. Lady accept that the Government are not bound by the criteria? The whole purpose of Agenda 2000 is that the criteria can be negotiated between the Government and the Commission. Will she consider widening the criteria to cover areas currently not covered, such as unemployment in port-related activities and, in particular, in the tourism sector?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Lady is right to say that the criteria are not yet set and will have to be negotiated. That is partly why I told my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) that matters were at an early stage. In all my answers, I have said that levels of unemployment must be taken into account. We are mindful of the different sorts of areas and the impact of those issues on different areas. We shall bear those matters in mind during the review and the negotiations.

Libya (Trade Missions)

15. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received from recent trade missions to Libya. [10040]

Mrs. Roche: I was made aware of the proposed visit by the British Libyan business group through its letter to me of 17 July. Officials in my Department have since received a very brief account of that visit over the telephone.

Mr. Dalyell: For the reasons deployed during the elongated Adjournment debate last Wednesday, and against the background of real doubts about whether Libya was responsible either for Lockerbie or for the brutal murder of Yvonne Fletcher, will the Department reflect on whether real harm is being done to British industry, which is suffering from not receiving orders from decision makers, most of whom were educated in this country? Has the Department reflected on how those huge orders are being creamed off by, in particular, France?

Mrs. Roche: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising—*[Laughter.]* I am sorry that Conservative Members laugh, because it is a very serious matter. I shall certainly draw my hon. Friend's concern to the attention of my colleagues at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. However, he will be aware that, since the murder of WPC Fletcher, we neither encourage nor discourage trade with Libya.

Mr. Baldry: Is the Minister aware that—regardless of whether the market is Libya or anywhere else—UK exporters are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain a competitive advantage because of higher interest rates, and particularly because of the increasing value of the pound sterling? What is the Board of Trade's policy on the matter? Is it monitoring the number of jobs being lost by UK exporters because of the pound's competitive position? What policies will the Board of Trade follow to ensure that UK exporters are not persistently disadvantaged against other European Union member states?

Mrs. Roche: We are giving full support to our exporters, both large and small. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be aware that exporters want a stable economic situation, which is what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is giving them—in contrast to the previous Conservative Administration's cycle of boom and bust, which did no favours for UK exporters.

Lloyd's of London

16. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will reconsider the case for an independent inquiry into the past conduct of the committee and council of Lloyd's of London. [10041]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My hon. Friend has already received a full response on the subject from my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry, and I have nothing to add to that reply. As for the future, however, the Government will be considering further the regulatory arrangements for Lloyd's in the context of the wider changes to financial services regulation that were announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on 20 May 1997, *Official Report*, columns 507-11, and the changes to insurance regulation that were announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 23 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *676*.

Mr. Cousins: I welcome the Minister's comments on bringing Lloyd's under a single powerful regulator and enforcer of regulations in the City of London, because such action will strengthen the City's case in world markets. However, serious questions about the past remain. Have Ministers received recent new evidence about the date on which the true extent of Lloyd's long-term liabilities arising out of American contracts became known to some members of the council and committee of Lloyd's and about what they did with that information? Has that evidence dealing with serious matters reached the Government? Are Ministers considering an inquiry under the Financial Services Act 1986? Have they referred the new evidence to the Serious Fraud Office?

Mr. McCartney: When I receive from my hon. Friend or from anyone else any new evidence of fraud or alleged fraud, the Department and I shall pass it to the Serious Fraud Office. We expect any such evidence to be passed to the Serious Fraud Office for consideration and appropriate action.

Bus Services (Scotland)

17. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to review the findings of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report into the supply of bus services in Glasgow and Central Scotland. [10042]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: FirstBus has requested a review of my predecessor's decision—which he announced on 24 January 1997, following the MMC's merger report—on its acquisition of SB Holdings Ltd. I have asked the Director General of Fair Trading for his advice on the request.

Mr. Galloway: I am glad to hear the Minister's answer. He should be aware of the widespread concern in the city of Glasgow about the cowboys from Stagecoach, who were assisted in every way by the previous Government to muscle in on a bus market that was already being well served by Strathclyde Buses—which has an excellent relationship with its large work force, with the city's users' groups and with the general public. Stagecoach is freely riding the range in Glasgow without the assistance of the provisions of the MMC report; therefore, arguments about competitiveness are no longer applicable.

Specifically, does the Minister accept that, because Stagecoach is already active in the city, the draconian demand that Strathclyde Buses divest itself of one of its Glasgow bus depots is unnecessary to foster competitiveness? Does he agree that the matter should be the subject of a very thorough review?

Mr. Griffiths: I shall certainly consider carefully FirstBus's request in the light of advice given to me by the Director General of Fair Trading.

Mr. Gray: When was the Minister last a fare-paying passenger on a bus?

Mr. Griffiths: Last weekend, when I paid 60p in Edinburgh.

Electricity Markets (Liberalisation)

18. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on her policy with regard to further liberalisation of electricity markets. [10043]

Mr. Battle: The Government inherited an electricity programme that had been left in drift by the former Administration. A top priority was for us to sort out the programme and, within weeks, we have done that because full competition in the UK electricity market and completion of the single European market in electricity remain key priorities for the Government.

Mr. Jenkin: Is the Minister aware of the difficulties with the settlement system in 1994 when the 100 kW market was opened up to some 50,000 customers? Is he absolutely confident that, on 1 April 1998, when some 23 million customers will have access to the pool, the settlement system will operate effectively? What steps has he taken to ensure that that will be the case?

Mr. Battle: We were well aware of exactly what was happening because we were pointing it out to the previous Government when some 5,000 commercial bill payers did not get their bills on time. We told the Government that that would happen if they did not put proper systems in place.

I have made it clear that the necessary systems must be robust and delivered in a timely manner. I commissioned a report from the Director General of Electricity Supply on the status of the programme and on his proposals for the way forward. That report was published on 29 May, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows. I then discussed the director general's proposals with him, the chief executives of all the public electricity suppliers and the electricity pool on 12 June. It was agreed that the director general's report provided a sound basis on which to take forward the rest of the work to deliver that competition in 1998. We are monitoring it closely to ensure that we get it right.

Research and Technology Organisations (Tax Status)

19. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she proposes to report on the tax-exempt status of those independent research and technology organisations which she is currently reviewing. [10044]

Mr. Battle: I expect to approve new arrangements for approving bodies under section 508 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 and to issue guidance for applicants by the autumn. I shall then deal with the outstanding applications for approval.

Dr. Cable: I thank the Minister for that reply but suggest that there is considerable anxiety among scientists that, in widening his net for soft targets, which recently included pension funds, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has his eye on such admirable institutions as the National Physical Laboratory in my constituency. They contribute enormously to the science base of the country and plough back all their surpluses into scientific investment. Will the Minister give us clear assurances that they will be kept free of taxation?

Mr. Battle: The matter that the hon. Gentleman questions under section 508 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 was raised by the previous Government who, to be fair to them, set up a review of how to tax research establishments. They published their proposals for comment on 28 April 1997, before the change of Government, but research associations will be affected. I know that the Association of Independent Research and Technology Organisations, which represents research establishments, is lobbying hard on this matter. I have met its representatives and, as far as I understand it, it is working constructively with officials, hoping to come to a mutually acceptable conclusion to ensure that genuine research is properly supported through the tax system, not priced out.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Is the Minister aware of the success of AEA Technology which, as a result of being floated and becoming a private research organisation, is expanding its employment and activities? Has he any further plans to float other Government-owned research organisations and to encourage them with the suggested tax exemptions?

Mr. Battle: I welcome the success of AEA Technology, but the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no.

Mains Gas (Doorstep Selling)

20. **Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement about the doorstep selling of mains gas. [10045]

Mr. Battle: I am concerned that some doorstep sellers seem to be engaging in misleading practices. I trust that the Director General of Gas Supply will put a stop to that. We intend to ensure that gas consumers get a fair deal and are not hoodwinked in the newly emerging energy markets.

Mrs. Gilroy: To ensure that future gas competition delivers benefits to the many, not the few, will my hon. Friend the Minister look at the recent request by the Gas Consumers Council for a licensed code of practice? That is needed before the extension of liberalisation to the electricity market.

Mr. Battle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question. I welcome her comments because I know that she has taken an interest in those matters and has championed consumers for a long time. I welcome the establishment of the Energy Selling Association and its code of practice, which is aimed at enhancing standards. Suppliers will need to make an effort to ensure that their agents act properly. We shall shortly announce consultation on proposals to strengthen the general law on doorstep selling. I hope that my hon. Friend will welcome that.

Madam Speaker's Statement

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: I have a short statement to make, which will be of interest to the House and needs to be put on record. It concerns the Order Paper, following the special report from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, which was published on Tuesday.

I am content with the Committee's broad approach in seeking to reform the House's working papers. Accordingly, some changes will take place in the appearance of those papers, with effect from the end of the recess. I should emphasise that my approval is based on the fact that no procedural changes are involved. What is proposed is a matter of presentation, in an effort to achieve greater clarity.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My point of order, of which I have given you notice, concerns the Prime Minister's answer to the questions of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition yesterday. In reference to the shareholding in BP by the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe, Lord Simon, the Prime Minister said:

> "The Minister has retained the BP shares because he is obliged to do so. Having been the chairman of BP, if he got rid of them he would fall foul of the rules on insider trading."—[*Official Report*, 30 July 1997; Vol. 299, c. 331.]

As that did not accord with my understanding of the model code for directors contained in the stock exchange listing rules or the provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1993 on insider trading, I sought advice from the House of Commons Library. It gave me a long response, part of which I should like to quote. On the specific question whether the Minister would have been permitted, as a former director of BP, to deal in BP shares under the model code, it said:

> "This would suggest a possible selling window between the ending of the close period on 6 May 1997 and at the latest the start of the next close period on 5 July 1997."

Unless the Minister had price-sensitive or other information that precluded him from dealing in his shares—information that was not disclosed to BP shareholders with the interim results—or BP has a code of practice stricter than the model code, it would appear that the Prime Minister inadvertently misled the House with his answer and that the Minister was entitled to deal in his shares.

Should that be the case, I feel that the Prime Minister will wish to come before the House at the first available opportunity to put the record straight. As today is Parliament's last sitting day before the recess, do you agree that it would be proper for him to come to the House today to make sure that there is no more confusion?

Madam Speaker: We have had many robust exchanges on this issue in recent times. Those on the Front Bench will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said, which is not a point of order for me to deal with.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I should like to draw attention to what happened yesterday in the House. I fear that the Government might be tempted to fall into some of the very bad practices of the previous Government, particularly that of routinely issuing policy changes and various announcements on the final day before a recess, which cannot be discussed by Parliament.

Yesterday, the Home Secretary was at the Dispatch Box for a whole hour, yet, remarkably, he did not once mention the drugs tsar or tsarina. We heard this morning that the Government are going ahead with that policy. It is well known that in America, the drugs tsar has been a disaster and has been described as a drugs nanny. Drugs tsars have not worked in any part of the world. All of us in the House who want to reduce the harm caused by the use of illegal drugs believe that the drugs tsar policy cannot work and is another excuse for not thinking and not having genuine reform, such as would result from the institution of a royal commission on the subject.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is expressing an opinion, not a point of order. He must pursue the matter through questions.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It will not have escaped your attention that the President of the Board of Trade, in reply to a supplementary asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) to Question 12, said that the Government were bound by the criteria on European aid set down by the Commission. In reply to my supplementary to Question 13, however, the right hon. Lady said that the Government were not bound by the criteria. Could the House be given clarification? I believe that we are not bound by the criteria and that the right hon. Lady can negotiate.

Madam Speaker: I fear that the hon. Lady is seeking to prolong Question Time, which was over at 3.30 pm.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In the most recent Question Time, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food kindly undertook, in the interests of openness and transparency, to ensure that all the responses that the Government had received to the consultation on Professor James's report on the food standards agency would be put in the Library of the House before the summer recess.

To date, all that has been put in the Library is a list of those who responded. Those of us who are keen to do some good summer reading would like the opportunity to read the whole lot during the recess. Can you, bring your influence to bear on the private office of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to ensure that all the responses are put in the Library before we rise for the summer recess?

Madam Speaker: I shall look at the response that was given and see what I can do about it. I am delighted that hon. Members want so much bedside reading.

Caledonian MacBrayne

3.36 pm

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 24, to debate an important matter that requires specific and urgent consideration, namely,

> the serious matter of the strike by Caledonian MacBrayne ferry crews on the Firth of Clyde which is due to begin on Monday.

I cannot stress too strongly the need for the dispute to be resolved immediately. If it is not, the consequences for the island communities and the Cowal peninsula will be severe. The ferries are lifeline links, and life on the island of Bute will be severely disrupted if the service between Rothesay and Wemyss bay ceases to operate. The strike will affect the transport of freight, including all the goods required for the island and animal foodstuffs, and the movement of livestock. It will affect out-patient clinics and the carriage of medical supplies, such as blood and pharmaceuticals. It will affect the ability of patients and relatives to reach hospitals on the mainland and the ability of commuters to travel to work.

On top of all that, the tourist trade on Bute and in Dunoon will be badly hit. The first two weeks of August are the busiest in the year and if the tourist trade slumps, there will be a dire effect on the already fragile economies of the area. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) must also be seriously concerned about Arran and the Cumbraes in his constituency, which will be cut off.

There is now a threat that the strike will spread north. If that happens, almost all the islands in my constituency could be affected. Only two have airports so Mull, Coll, Colonsay and Tiree, to name but a few, will be completely isolated, to say nothing of the Outer Hebrides.

I know that Scottish Office Ministers will insist that the dispute is a matter for the company and its employees to sort out and that they cannot interfere, but I say that they can and must. Caledonian MacBrayne is a public company and the Scottish Office holds the purse strings. If it will not allow Caledonian MacBrayne to offer better terms and conditions, Ministers should meet the union, explain the situation and make every effort to resolve the dispute. I hope, Madam Speaker, that you will allow a debate to consider the matter.

Madam Speaker: I have listened carefully to what the hon. Lady said. As she knows, I have to give my decision without stating any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider the matter that she has raised to be appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 24, so I cannot submit her application to the House at this time.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wonder whether you could ask the authorities of the House to check the annunciator screen. It would appear that many hon. Members are unaware that the Scottish debate is about to start, as I can count only seven or eight Government Back Benchers from Scotland in the Chamber for the start of an important debate on Scotland. Surely the reason must be that the annunciator screen has failed to work throughout the building, and Scottish Members will not be able to come

[Mr. Eric Forth]

here in time. Will you consider a temporary suspension of the House, to allow more Scottish Labour Members to arrive?

Madam Speaker: It was a good try, but I have no intention of suspending the House. There are four Scottish Members immediately behind the right hon. Gentleman.

Scottish Devolution

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

3.39 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Donald Dewar) *rose—*

Hon. Members: Where are they?

Mr. Dewar: That is a good question. Where are they? The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) will recognise that we do not have to ask that question about Scottish Conservative Members or ask fake questions about annunciator screens to make the point that, apart from a few refugees in England, there are no Scottish Conservative Members. Perhaps that will concentrate his mind a little on the seriousness of his party's plight and the difficulties that the Conservatives face in Scotland without a single Member of Parliament.

We published the White Paper "Scotland's Parliament" last week. I was a little overwhelmed by the strength of the welcome that it received. It is widely recognised that it is not just another document produced by The Stationery Office. There are inevitably many White Papers, but this is the first on Scotland that anyone can remember which has sold and continues to sell as fast as it can be printed. I do not like airs and graces and I am not a great hand at pomposity, although I occasionally try to rise to the occasion. I can say only that people are fascinated by their own history and want to be part of it. There is a genuine feeling that history is in the making in Scotland and in the House, where the authority lies for giving devolution a fair wind.

The White Paper is not a theoretical text. Rather, it is intended to be a profoundly practical document, setting out what the Scottish Parliament will be like once it is in being and explaining the steps by which it will be established. It is a clear statement of what the Government intend to do, and our aim has been to make the detail of our proposals as accessible as possible. In that sense, I hope that we have succeeded. We want as many people as possible in Scotland to understand what the Scottish Parliament can add to their quality of life. We want them to be in possession of the facts and familiar with the arguments, so that on 11 September they will be in a good position to make what can fairly be described as an historic choice.

The House will accept that it is important to see the Government's commitment to a Scottish Parliament as not simply a commitment to Scotland, but an essential part of our wider commitment to modernising the constitution of the United Kingdom. If people are apathetic about government—and I fear that it is often the case—and sometimes even cynical, it is because the institutions of government have lost touch with the people they serve. In general political terms, we believe that there is a pressing priority to do something about that. We want to change that atmosphere and that perception. We want to modernise the constitution of the United Kingdom and make it fit the 21st century.

In previous exchanges in the House, I have stressed that we propose devolution and reform within the United Kingdom. Let me take the opportunity to do so once again. We accept that sovereignty within a devolved system lies with the United Kingdom Parliament. That sovereignty can be exercised in a number of different ways. The choice that we are asking Parliament to make is to pass some of its practical day-to-day power to a directly elected Scottish Parliament representing the people of Scotland. I recognise that, of course, that cannot be done without the consent of a majority of Members of this Parliament, representing every part of the country. It is my job not only to convince Scotland that the proposal is right, but to carry my hon. Friends and hon. Members from all parties in that cause.

I turn to the case for a Scottish Parliament, a Welsh Assembly and a strategic authority and elected mayor for London. I should say in passing that I greatly welcome the meeting of minds among Opposition Members on the question of an elected mayor for London. It is always a little difficult when one has been attacking something with great fury and one's new leader comes along and announces that he is in favour of it. I know that Opposition Members will adapt bravely to that. On this occasion, I think that the Leader of the Opposition is in the right.

All the changes are aimed at fundamentally involving people in decisions that matter to them. There is already government in Scotland; some people would say, a lot. My Department has nearly 12,000 civil servants. They do a good job, but we believe that the structure within which they operate could be more effective and could more effectively and directly reflect Scottish opinion. There is a great range of quangos, great and small, delivering different services and functions in almost every area of Scottish life. What is needed, and what we shall deliver, is a more effective democratic framework, connecting all those various institutions to the people of Scotland.

The case for a Scottish Parliament is at the heart of such a process. It will strengthen democratic control, increase accountability, and above all bring decision making out of the shadows. As no doubt many hon. Members know—and I am learning—government works in ever-increasing mysterious ways. Discovering that is part of my daily life at the moment. There is a good deal to be said for bringing government closer to the people and ensuring that they are aware of exactly what it is about.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dewar: It is very early. The hon. Gentleman is very persistent; this is his chance.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. He is always courteous. I should like to ask a genuine question—I am trying not to be party political.

The Secretary of State will know that, in generating regulation and law in the European Union, we try to bring things together, so that one can trade across countries, and laws are similar. Why is it right now to say to a Scottish Parliament, "Please, go off in a different direction"? After all, that is the whole purpose of having a separate Parliament. In this place, we tend to legislate for England, for Wales and for Scotland, but the legislation is basically the same. Although I would like changes, surely a Scottish Parliament is the wrong way of going about it.

Mr. Dewar: I am genuinely glad that the hon. Gentleman has deserted partisan politics to ask a genuine question, and I think that he probably needs the answer. We have legislated for England, Wales and Scotland in this House in the past, but I ought to stress that, if the hon. Gentleman looks at the laws, he will see that they are not necessarily the same.

Mr. Bruce: They come together.

Mr. Dewar: No, there is no necessary convergence built in, either. Of course, there are many areas—and many areas in the legislation that we propose in the White Paper—where we leave matters on a United Kingdom basis because we believe that that is right. There are, for example, important level playing fields for commerce and industry, and for a whole range of issues such as company law reform, labour legislation and monopolies and mergers—there is a mass of them—but in many other areas, such as housing, education and a raft of structural facets of life, there is a very distinct tradition in Scotland. The institutional framework within which Scots live is distinct and different. The whole point about the Union was that it was a coming together of nations in one partnership, but that distinction was maintained by the preservation of Scottish legislation.

I agree with the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) that, in any particular area or for any proposal, there is not necessarily a virtue in being different for the sake of being different, but there are many areas in which it is right that the law should recognise the different and continuing traditions, attitudes and cultures that we have in the northern part of the United Kingdom. Putting those under direct democratic control in Scotland is the point of the whole exercise.

If the hon. Gentleman is saying that he wants to snuff out—that is a bad expression to use, because it suggests sudden change—that difference, gently and over time, he and I are fundamentally opposed. I believe that differences enrich cultural societies and nation states, even though they remain as one. I do not want to see those differences, as a matter of policy, eroded and elided. I do not glory in those differences—that is a little too jingoistic—but they are a positive advantage to the whole country. It is right that we should recognise the separate traditions in the structures of the United Kingdom, and that is one of the principal reasons why I started—many years ago—to support a form of devolution.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Perhaps this is a convenient moment to put to my right hon. Friend a question that bothers the Law Society of Scotland. How will the devolution of criminal law and procedure, in paragraph 2.4 of the White Paper, dovetail with the reservation to the United Kingdom of drugs, firearms, road traffic, immigration law, the activities of the security services in the detection of crime, and offences under the Companies Acts, in paragraph 3.3? I understand that my right hon. Friend has been given notice of the question by the Law Society of Scotland.

Mr. Dewar: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has drawn that question to my attention—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hon. Friend."] He is indeed a friend of many years' standing. No doubt the Law Society will be glad that he raised the question, although I suspect that it knows the answer.

[Mr. Dewar]

Certain parts of our criminal law have always been legislated for on a United Kingdom basis. It is generally accepted in the House—certainly by me, even if not by the nationalists, for reasons that we all understand—that, for example, there would be obvious disadvantages if the classification of dangerous drugs differed between Scotland and England. That would complicate the work of the enforcement agencies, whether Customs and Excise, the Crown Prosecution Service or the police. The classification of dangerous drugs has, sensibly, been done on a United Kingdom basis, but the essence of criminal law in Scotland, which is an important aspect of our different approach, will be devolved.

That cannot be a great puzzle to my hon. Friend, because he knows that that is the situation at the moment. The misuse of drugs is covered by UK legislation, but much of the criminal law is Scottish legislation. That is a distinction that has worked well in the past, and it is now being more completely recognised through being reflected in the institutional structure as well as in the body of the law.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Given that we have had a single, unitary Parliament in the United Kingdom for the past 300 years and the rich and separate legal tradition in Scotland has prospered, has not the right hon. Gentleman talked himself out of the need for a separate Parliament in Scotland? *[Interruption.]* He may be appealing only to the jeering nationalists and some of the extremists on the Labour Benches, such as the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), who want a Scottish Parliament somehow to insulate Scotland from the consequences of being part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dewar: No one, so far as I know, has been jeering in the debate today—as yet. I know a jeering Scot Nat when I hear one and I fear that the hon. Gentleman has led a sheltered life. We have heard only a friendly and supportive muttering so far.

The hon. Gentleman's point need not detain us very long. He is right to say that Scots law has survived—I welcome that—but that does not mean that we should not continue to improve the structure and adapt our systems to play to our strengths. We in Scotland see our distinctive law as one of our strengths. So does Westminster, because no one, not even the hon. Member for South Dorset, has suggested that separate Scottish legislation should be abolished. Therefore, devolution is right institutionally.

The case for a Scottish Parliament is that it can ensure that whatever is done by the Government best suits Scotland's needs. That is an optimistic statement, and the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) is entitled to suggest that the Scottish Parliament, like every other Parliament, will make mistakes. However, any mistakes will at least be our own and we can kick each other and not the hon. Gentleman, which may be a relief to him.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I appreciate the proposal's importance to Scotland, but it must be put in a United Kingdom context, and the right hon. Gentleman has been doing so. He talked with feeling—I understand this—about Scotland's cultural need for decisions that are acceptable in Scotland to be taken, and a devolved Parliament will help to do that. However, the scheme envisages the retention at Westminster of 58 Scottish Members of Parliament, who will be able to vote on matters of purely English concern thereafter, and their views might not be in accord with those of the majority of English Members representing their constituents.

I am sorry to raise this central issue so early in the debate, but as the Secretary of State touched on it so positively in the Scottish context, I should be interested to have his answer in an English and United Kingdom context.

Mr. Dewar: I hope that my whole speech will answer that, in a sense. The hon. Gentleman must not try to second-guess the boundary commissioners and write purely speculative—I fear that it is speculation touched with malice—figures into the record. I appreciate why he has done it, but I deplore it.

I want a fair and balanced package. I accept entirely that people must look at the balance, weigh all the advantages and disadvantages, and make up their mind which side of the balance they are on. There are substantial advantages for the United Kingdom as a whole. I stress again—this may become something of a gramophone record as the months unfold—that, if devolution is to go ahead, it must be approved by a majority of Members from United Kingdom constituencies, irrespective of political colour. A sovereign Parliament should be able to look at the government of this country—at what many people would call, to use a cliché, the democratic deficit—and wish to move to right it. That seems to be what this is about.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, who is twitching on the edge of his seat, but I want to make a little progress.

This is a strong, good and stable settlement for the United Kingdom. It can be compared with the Scotland Act 1978, which reached the statute book but ultimately was not implemented. The House will realise that the law-making powers that would go to a Scottish Parliament in this version are much stronger and wider in range, and reflect in part the growth of Scottish Office responsibilities over the past 20 years. They also reflect the fact that, unlike the 1978 proposals, we shall devolve the whole range of Scottish Office functions, with one or two prescribed and limited exceptions, to the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive.

Furthermore, we propose to give the Scottish Parliament some additional responsibilities. For example, the Lord Advocate's functions were not included in the devolved powers in the previous Bill. There will be financial assistance for industry, subject to sensible arrangements to ensure level playing fields in areas where that is important throughout the United Kingdom. This time we also propose to devolve forestry and responsibility for commercial ports and inland waterways.

It is difficult for me, with my lengthy perspective—I think that that means that I have been here for a long time—to remember that, in the 1978 package, universities and higher education were not devolved functions. Nor were agriculture and fisheries or economic development. This is a much more rational, tidy and stable division of responsibilities between Westminster and the Scottish Parliament. That is an important virtue, and I commend it to the House.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): The Secretary of State mentioned forestry. The White Paper states, in the list of items to be devolved:

> "the Secretary of State for Scotland's functions, including his power of direction over the Forestry Commission, will be transferred to the Scottish Executive".

I understand that the Secretary of State currently has total powers over the Forestry Commission for the whole of the United Kingdom. Simply passing control to the Scottish Executive would therefore pass to it the "power of direction" over English and Welsh forests.

Mr. Dewar: I am genuinely glad that the hon. Gentleman raised that, as it is an important and quite sensitive area. He has misunderstood the position of the Secretary of State for Scotland. I must make it clear, for the sake of my relationships with my colleagues in the Cabinet, that the Scottish Office is the lead Ministry, but the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Welsh Office have joint responsibility. We are very careful. Ministers in the previous Government will agree that we go to great trouble to move in unison and to agree policy decisions.

Obviously, there will be a new factor—devolution—and there will have to be discussions about the Forestry Commission itself and how it responds to the challenge. Those discussions are already under way, as a preliminary against the devolution proposals making progress. We are quite confident that those discussions, which are taking place in a very constructive mood, will come up with internal solutions for the new situation. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, in forestry matters, my writ does not run south of the border, other than in terms of being the lead Minister of the consortium of interested Ministers. That is the position.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Mr. Dewar: No, I am very sorry. I am not trying to be difficult, but it is already 4 o'clock and I feel that I have hardly got started. Now there is a threat for all hon. Members.

Mr. Bruce: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I do not want to be difficult, but the right hon. Gentleman appears to be—

Madam Speaker: That is obviously a point of frustration and not a point of order. The hon. Gentleman is seeking to catch my eye in the debate. I have a number of hon. Members who will not be called if we continually get interventions and bogus points of order during speeches.

Mr. Dewar: I am grateful, Madam Speaker. I should be delighted if the hon. Gentleman wrote to me, and if he does not like my answer, it will give a much—

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may raise the matter if he seeks to catch my eye.

Mr. Dewar: Indeed he may, Madam Speaker, and I hope to be here—Oh well, no. *[Laughter.]* That might be going too far.

A second and crucial difference from 1978—I shall telescope this—is that we have moved to define the reserved rather than the devolved powers, to ensure maximum clarity and stability. Anyone looking at the 1978 Act would see a somewhat grudging document, which would have required frequent updating. There would have been a greater danger—I put it no higher than that—of arguments over vires. We wished to minimise the difficulties of interpretation and to allow for maximum flexibility in future. We have done so.

My third point is that the Secretary of State for Scotland will not have what is sometimes called the governor-general role, which was at the heart of the 1978 Act and was put upon the shoulders of the Secretary of State. The Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive will have their own direct relationships with the Crown, rather than using the Secretary of State as an intermediary. Legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament will not need to go to the Secretary of State for consideration and approval before it is passed to the Queen for Royal Assent. It is important that we do not have such overriding decisions. It would have sullied the atmosphere and made for great difficulties. I am glad about that particular extension.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way on this extremely important point, and I very much agree with his analysis. In the contrast that he is drawing between the current proposals and those of the late 1970s, he has been sensible enough to recognise the inevitable reduction in the number of Scottish Members of Parliament going to Westminster. When one considers this bold and imaginative White Paper in that respect, it is de facto the case that the office of Secretary of State effectively becomes redundant. If this reaches a successful conclusion, does he anticipate being the last holder of the office of Secretary of State, not just in its present form, but as a meaningful office of state at Cabinet level?

Mr. Dewar: That office certainly will change in character quite radically, because of the 12,000 civil servants and the range of legislative responsibilities passed to the Scottish Parliament. There will, in my view, still be a need for liaison. In the important areas of foreign affairs, defence, economic affairs in particular and fiscal affairs, there will still be a need for a Scottish voice in the Administration of the day, in United Kingdom terms. I do not share the hon. Gentleman's absolutist view on that matter, although I accept that it is something in which his party has believed for a very long time.

What is certain is that the Secretary of State will not have what I referred to as a governor-general role. To be fair, if one looks back to 1978, the White Paper made the point that it was expected that the Secretary of State could object to and block a Scottish Parliament Bill on the basis that he did not agree with it as a matter of policy. There was then a considerable outcry, and that was diluted in section 38 to the circumstances in which it would or might affect a reserved matter and was not in the public interest. But the override was there in a way that would have made for great difficulties in interpretation. The clarity of the new settlement is important.

I very much doubt whether my old friend who was Secretary of State at that time saw himself in a governor-general role, but certainly he was driven out of it by popular outcry. Some hon. Members may remember

[Mr. Dewar]

that, on one occasion, the late George Brown, on being introduced to someone who had just become a governor-general, established conversationally that he had a hat with plumes and, as he left, said in a friendly way that he hoped that his feathers would fall out. I think that that is what happened to the governor-general role way back then, and we have finally buried the matter.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring) *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: Oh, a Front-Bench spokesman.

Dr. Fox: The Secretary of State has been quite good at following the point through in the debate, but how does he envisage the role of the Secretary of State developing if there is a Scottish Parliament of one colour in Edinburgh and a United Kingdom Parliament of a different political colour in London?

Mr. Dewar: The Secretary of State might be a little busier and his job might be a little more difficult, but that perhaps underlines the need for it. I met a Member of Parliament the other day—I make no complaint because he had not been following the argument—who thought that the Secretary of State would be in the Scottish Parliament, reflecting its political colour. The Secretary of State is a member of the United Kingdom Government and, clearly, his role will be to consider Scotland and Scotland's needs according to the beliefs and opinions of that Government, reflecting them in the counsels of that Government. We could argue about the detail, but the position is perfectly clear.

I want to push on to one or two other quick points, because I might outstay my welcome. The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive—I mention this particularly because I recognise that it is a matter of great controversy; rather more controversy than I expected—will obviously have a role and will be closely involved in European decision making and will have a presence in Brussels. The White Paper uses the words:

> "The closest possible working relationships and involvement",

and involvement of the Scottish Executive

> "as directly and fully as possible in the Government's decision making on European Union matters"

is what is on offer.

To end all doubts, I make it clear that I accept that of course the Scottish Executive representative will want to try to influence and take part in that matter. But at the end of the day, the United Kingdom is the member state and a common United Kingdom position will have to be evolved, and everyone will have a duty to try to advance that position in negotiations with other member states.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): That raises an interesting point of constitutional law. The United Kingdom is responsible for negotiating its obligations as a member state, but the Scottish Parliament would have to implement them, which might lead to difficulties. Has the Secretary of State considered any potential constitutional difficulties in that relationship?

Mr. Dewar: Sotto voce he says, "Everyone else has," but that may be optimistic. However, I have and my colleagues have. I accept that the hon. Lady, who I think is still a Member of the European Parliament for a southern English seat, although she represents a northern English parliamentary seat in the House, raises a perfectly legitimate point. If she looks at the White Paper, as I am sure she will have and will have just missed this, she will see that it takes great care to lay a duty on the Scottish Parliament to implement European law and directives. The reason for that—she is absolutely right—is that, if it refused to do so, the penalty for non-compliance would fall upon the United Kingdom Government as a member state, and that would be demonstrably unfair. That is why, as is the mark of the White Paper, we have tried to face up to these difficulties and to write in the necessary machinery.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Secretary of State is undoubtedly correct to say that member states have certain rights and entitlements in the European structure of decision making, which are not given to non-member states or, indeed, regions of member states. However, the White Paper envisages Scottish Parliament representatives leading the UK delegation on specific matters. What does he expect those matters to be? How often does he think that a Scottish Parliament representative will lead the UK delegation?

Mr. Dewar: I would not speculate about that, although there are precedents where Scottish Office Ministers have regulated parts of discussions and, occasionally, spoken in debates as members of the UK delegation. It is difficult to predict or to play the numbers game. I know that the hon. Gentleman is interested in the numbers game. He predicted confidently the number of seats that his party would win at the election. He was wrong. I make no complaint about that, but it is a dangerous game. If he looks at the White Paper, he will see that a strong and robust role is proposed for Scottish Executive representatives as part of the UK delegation.

I am afraid that I do not often go to Europe these days to visit the Commission or to go to Brussels. I am aware—as the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) will be—of the active role played by many constitutional structures below nation state level, such as the German länder, the Spanish autonomous provinces and the Italian provinces. There are a lot of them, and they all work extremely effectively on behalf of the areas that they represent. There is a real and positive virtue from a Scottish point of view, in having the Scottish Parliament involved at that level.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): What would happen if the Scottish Parliament decided to comply with EU directives where the United Kingdom had applied for derogation? That is very important for many Scottish industries.

Mr. Dewar: That is ingenious. I would want to write to the hon. Lady about that. *[Interruption.]* Well, this is a serious debate. I do not know whether that is possible. I can think of precedents, but I would want to check them. I think it is possible to have derogation for an area within a member state, but before I say something that could be quoted against me—quite fairly—I should like to check.

It is important that we recognise the virtue of fiscal powers in a situation such as this. In tiers of government—whether it is local or central Government—there are powers to vary the revenue, and that seems right for the Scottish Parliament. We were influenced in this by the Conservative party's attacks on the "constitutional irresponsibility" of a body that did not have such powers, at least on the margins. I say that, because I ought to make it clear that the powers we are suggesting are comparatively modest, as against the block-and-formula arrangements for allocating on an agreed basis the resources of the United Kingdom to Scotland. I accept that that is an interesting and testing process.

We have added to the process the right to reduce or increase income tax at the basic rate by up to 3p in the pound, producing a levy at current terms of a maximum of about £450 million. That seems to me to be right, because it asks the Scottish Parliament to face real financial choices and makes it, in a sense, more directly accountable to the people it represents. The important point is that we are trusting the people of Scotland to make choices on their own behalf. After all, Scots elected to the UK Parliament and to local government are trusted in that way, and the new Parliament should be as well.

We have built in two specific safeguards with which the House will be familiar. First, income from savings and dividends will not be affected by the tax-varying powers. We were influenced heavily in reaching that decision by the need to have a level playing field for the financial services industry in Scotland, which is particularly important in insurance and pensions. Secondly, if the Parliament's power to raise the £450 million—which will be index-linked to preserve its real value—were eroded at some hypothetical future date by changes in the United Kingdom tax structure, an alternative base with the same sort of impact in terms of distribution would be provided by the Treasury.

It is important to recognise that the power may be used to deal with some special project or difficulty. I do not expect that it would simply be added to the block-and-formula sum that is negotiated as a continuously available additional revenue support. I believe that that would constitute a misuse of the power—although, of course, it would be a matter for the Scottish Parliament. The power must be seen in the context of the United Kingdom direct taxation system as a whole. Moreover, I am advised by the Treasury that, of those who currently pay tax in Scotland, 29 per cent. would not have been affected if it had applied this year. That 29 per cent. consists of those with the lowest incomes in the tax system.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): While the Secretary of State is on the subject of the tax-raising powers and the revenue of £450 million, will he explain something in the White Paper? Paragraph 7.13 states:

> "It is of course possible that future changes to the UK income tax structure might reduce the value of the product of the Scottish Parliament's tax-varying power. In these circumstances, the Parliament's ability to raise or forgo up to £450 million through the tax system will be preserved."

Does that mean that, if taxation in the United Kingdom—led by a Conservative Government—went down, the Scottish Parliament would still be able to levy £450 million on the Scottish people, which could well represent more than 3p in the pound?

Mr. Dewar: It would not represent more than 3p in the pound. I can imagine the hon. Gentleman attacking me with some vim and vigour on the ground that, at some stage, the basic rate might contract and become so narrow that no significant revenue could be raised. He produced his question as if it were a trick question that I was trying to avoid, but, in fact, I have spent quite a bit of the last few minutes referring to the possibility, and explaining why we had built the machinery into the system. If the hon. Gentleman thinks about it, he will probably see that it is fair and reasonable.

Mr. Dalyell: Mine is not a trick question. Yesterday in the House, I asked:

> "If the tax produces only £250 million, what happens then?"—[*Official Report*, 30 July 1997; Vol. 299, c. 374.]

As was explained by the accountants Ernst and Young, the £450 million figure given by the Treasury was calculated on the basis of earned income and saved income. As I understand that we are dealing only with earned income, the amount could be very much less than £450 million. Will there not be a problem in making good the shortfall?

Mr. Dewar: I know that my hon. Friend has been talking to Ernst and—[HON. MEMBERS: "Young."] Ernst and Young—a small accountancy firm that has an office in Glasgow.

Since my hon. Friend first raised the point, I have checked the figures again. The exemption of savings income is almost de minimis. It does not raise very much, but an alternative arrangement would greatly complicate the system and cause the difficulties in relation to the financial services industry to which I have already referred. I am assured by the Inland Revenue that, on the basis of the 1997–98 figures, it is satisfied that £450 million would be the proper figure. I am talking about the use of the power at its maximum. There is a tendency to assume that it will always be used at its maximum, but that is not necessarily true. Indeed, the power may not be used at all in any given year.

I believe that our White Paper tackles many tough issues. We have tried to face up to some of the fundamental criticisms of the 1978 package. I have been talking about the powers, but other issues have prompted controversy and difficulty over the years. One, obviously, is the electoral system.

Saturday was a rather unusual day for me. I left Glasgow at about 11 am after some engagements, and returned to Glasgow at 9 pm via Stornoway and Kirkwall. That was almost certainly the only day in my life when I shall do that. I did it because it is important to recognise that Scotland is a different community with many facets. In 1979, the voting patterns in the referendum were different.

I was glad of the opportunity to go to the Western Isles and Orkney to discuss some of the problems with the people there. I was able to tell them that the proportional voting system that we advocate should mean that all strands of opinion will be fairly represented, not just in the north-east and in the highlands but in the central belt, where minority opinion has sometimes found it difficult to make a breakthrough. That is controversial in terms of my party and its short-term interests, but with a new start, it is right to tackle the issue. We did not shirk tackling it.

[Mr. Dewar]

The reasoning that I have outlined also applies to Westminster representation, although I do not wish to expand on that. When the restriction, which has artificially boosted the number of Scottish Members above the population ratio, is removed, the boundary commission will look at the matter. That examination will be subject to the geographical and community tie arguments, which are currently part of the statutory criteria.

We have also tackled the problem of consent, which was again mentioned a few days ago by Conservative Members. I understand the force of the statement that we cannot say why people vote in general elections. Right, let us face that and have a referendum. We shall have a hard-working and perhaps an occasionally nervous summer, but the issue will be settled and a decisive yes on both counts will enable us to go forward with authority and added impetus.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will let me finish this point.

I should like to draw attention—I almost said "pay tribute", but that could get me into trouble throughout the House—to the interview with the Leader of the Opposition on "The World This Weekend" on 27 July, in which the right hon. Gentleman dealt significantly with the issue. At times the interview was somewhat confused, but I imply no criticism, because I have great sympathy for people who find themselves at the wrong end of an issue that has been made awkward by what has been said with great virulence for months or years.

The tone of the interview was important. Speaking about the people of Scotland and Wales, the right hon. Gentleman said:

> "If they vote for it in the referendum then they will get a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly and we will have to respect that for the future . . . if it's clearly stated we will listen to it. If the public approve that idea in the referendum then we are not going to be able to say and we might want to say . . . we can get rid of these things in a few years time".

That is an important decision by the Leader of the Opposition. He says that he will give some stability to the system and a fair run. I do not suggest that that is set in concrete and that it can never be altered or improved.

I and, I think, many Scottish voters were worried that the issue could become a political punchball and that, if the Conservatives were elected on a national swing in four or five years, they would, as a matter of prejudiced policy, simply dismantle the Parliament on the basis of the evidence of the moment. The Leader of the Opposition has laid that fear to rest. In a way, he is giving enormous legitimacy to the referendum by saying that, if people vote yes, the Opposition, and presumably a Conservative Government elected under his leadership, will recognise that that must be worked with.

We are all interested in making Britain's constitutional machinery a success, and the Conservatives will play their part in that. That is the right approach by the Opposition, although my saying that may not encourage Opposition Members. The important statement by the Leader of the Opposition underlines the opportunity that the referendum provides. If we take it cleanly and it results in a reasonable or a handsome majority, we shall have a fair chance to make a success of the proposals.

Mr. Sayeed: My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition spoke about the opinion of the Scottish people being "clearly stated"; the Secretary of State repeated those words. If about 40 per cent. of an artificially deflated electorate in Scotland vote and there is a 60:40 majority, it means that only 24 per cent. of those who are eligible to vote will have voted for a major constitutional change. Is that enough, given that it will do much damage to the Union?

Mr. Dewar: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is still fighting that battle. The result on the day will have to be judged by the House and by individual Members. It is a matter not simply of turnout, but of turnout balanced against the majority, or otherwise, that is achieved. Both factors have to be taken into account. The majority of the Labour party fought hard against franchises in 1978. I was there; I arrived in the middle of those arguments. We should not rig ballots in that way.

Although the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and his colleagues made some fairly fierce speeches on the matter, to his credit, when it came to the bit, none of the threshold amendments was pushed to a vote—

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): We were not allowed to.

Mr. Dewar: In the House of Lords, where there are some Conservatives, who might even listen to the right hon. Gentleman—he may even have connections there, when I come to think of it—the relevant amendments were not pushed to a vote. He should take my praise, because I was just about to congratulate him on his common sense in not doing so in this place. The ingenious and no doubt agile arithmetic that the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) has produced is not going to be relevant, but we shall all make the judgment, when the result comes, and I hope that we shall not end up in that argument and situation.

Mr. Grieve: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dewar: With all respect, I have taken many points of information.

Madam Speaker: Fourteen.

Mr. Dewar: I am obliged. That is clearly the appropriate phrase, but I do not regret taking those interventions, because I recognise that there is genuine interest and a genuine debate to be had.

Everything depends on the election, on the votes in that referendum and, ultimately, of course—if we get through that hoop—on the Scottish Parliament performing well and serving the people of the United Kingdom, particularly the people of Scotland, well. If the Scottish Parliament proves effective and popular in practice, its future will be secure. What has been said by Opposition Members has underlined that point, and I welcome it.

This settlement balances the interests of Scotland and of the United Kingdom, and it will strengthen and benefit both. I have genuinely learned much from the debates. It is important to debate these issues and I look forward to taking part in many more debates, if the legislation, as I hope, is introduced.

I even learned something from the House of Lords yesterday. My acquaintance the Earl of Mar and Kellie intends to stand for the Scottish Parliament, and quite right, too—he is a Liberal and a social worker and the two are not incompatible. I had not come across Lord Sempill before—I asked my office and found out that he used to be the Master of Sempill. I did not know that it was a place: I obviously do not know my Scotland. He also announced from the Cross Benches that he hoped to stand, although in what interest he did not say. I welcome that level of interest. He said:

> "The opportunity to help develop a better society for the people of Scotland and build a stronger Union is there to be had.
>
> If we let tradition freeze our minds, new ideas cannot be cultivated."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 30 July 1997; Vol. 582, c. 201.]

We may say that they are not the most elegant of words, but I am delighted to quote them; they are perhaps from an unlikely ally. It is an opportunity in that sense.

If we look at the White Paper, the absence of override powers, the way in which we have sculpted the legislation, defining the reserved and not the devolved areas of policy, the fairer electoral system, the opportunities in Europe within the United Kingdom framework, the fixed powers as buttressed and defined and the strengthening of democratic controls, we are looking at a very good package, modernised and improved compared with that of 1978 and that of the Scottish Constitutional Convention—a different package for a different day and the right package for the right time.

It will be a grown-up Parliament with grown-up duties. We must reject the idea that, in some way, the electorate of Scotland or their elected representatives cannot be trusted to do a good and responsible job. Too often, when it is boiled down, that is the essence of the argument from Conservative Members. Scottish politics will be a drear and dreich prospect if we pass up this opportunity. It is a time for hope and optimism. I hope that my colleagues in Scotland, the people of Scotland, my political friends and allies and people far beyond that will make sure that we do not miss this opportunity.

Royal Assent

Madam Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Appropriation (No. 2) Act 1997
Finance (No. 2) Act 1997
Education (Schools) Act 1997
Law Officers Act 1997
Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Act 1997
King's College London Act 1997

Scottish Devolution

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.

4.31 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): We knew that the Secretary of State was on dicey ground when, at the end of his somewhat lengthy speech—I pay tribute to him for taking so many interventions—he founded his final remarks on a quotation from an hereditary peer. As I understand it, the Labour party wants to abolish the role of hereditary peers in the House of Lords. It seems a little ungracious to use such a quotation as the basis on which the right hon. Gentleman asked the House to support the White Paper.

I know that the Secretary of State for Scotland, unlike his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, is genuinely committed in his advocacy of Scottish devolution in general and the White Paper in particular. However, I think that he is dangerously and damagingly wrong. Interestingly, he referred to the number of White Papers that had been sold and said that it was a best seller. I should remind him that some best sellers are horror stories or science fiction, and that nearly all are fiction.

Mr. Dewar: Penny dreadfuls.

Mr. Ancram: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that helpful explanation.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for showing his customary courtesy. Before he gets into his stride, will he be kind enough to confirm that he is not altogether hostile to the theory and practice of political devolution? Is not it the case that, contained within the framework document published in February 1995, there is a proposal for the setting up of a unicameral assembly with legislative and executive responsibilities? Had his party won the election on 1 May and had he become the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, presumably he would have been advocating that sort of devolution for Northern Ireland. Is that not the case?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman should read the framework document carefully, because it makes it clear that it was not a blueprint to be acted on, but was a proposal to aid discussions between the parties. That was made clear at the time, for very good reasons. The point has arisen on a number of occasions and it would be wise for the hon. Member to ask his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether such interventions are helpful to her in what she is trying to do now.

The Government's proposals carry within them the virus that will begin to eat away, and eventually cause to unravel, the bonds that hold the United Kingdom together. It is not written into the White Paper, but the virus is there. The proposals are the first step on the way to an independent Scotland and the break-up of the United Kingdom. Conservative Members know that and the Scottish National party knows that, too. That is why it decided last weekend to support the double yes campaign.

We must ask the Secretary of State whether he really believes that, if he was right in his assertion that these measures protect the Union—that is the case he made today and on previous occasions—the SNP would be campaigning alongside him. It would not. He must know, as I know, that a Scottish Parliament will never be satisfied with the powers and resources that it is given. The dynamic of devolution will always ensure that it seeks more of both, and when it does not get them, it will always blame this Parliament at Westminster.

Eighteen years of propaganda have created enormously high expectations of a Scottish Parliament. Were one to come about, it would not take long for those expectations to be dashed. When schools did not improve, when hospital provision did not get better, when new housing did not appear, the Scottish Parliament would not take the blame—it would lay the blame on Westminster. When Scottish taxes were higher than those south of the border, that would be blamed on a parsimonious Westminster. To an ever-increasing extent, Westminster would be the whipping boy for the perceived failures of a Scottish Parliament.

Dr. Lynda Clark (Edinburgh, Pentlands): My intervention is intended to be helpful as I am hoping to give you some support for your devolutionary credentials. I think that you are the same person—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I did not make any statement. I know that the hon. Lady is a new Member, so I must advise her that when she uses the term "you" she is talking about me.

Dr. Clark: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Perhaps I should start again.

I am trying to assist the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) with his devolutionary credentials. In June 1979, he said that there was

> "a genuine need and a genuine desire for constitutional reform not only in Scotland but in the rest of the United Kingdom."—[*Official Report*, 20 June 1979; Vol. 968, c. 1412.]

The right hon. Member must have had some form of devolution in mind, so I should be grateful to know what form he would support.

Mr. Ancram: The date to which the hon. Lady referred was shortly after I had spent three months, together with the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), campaigning for a no vote. I pay tribute to the strength of the hon. Gentleman's arguments against a Scottish Parliament of the sort that we are now discussing. I stood alongside him then, I agreed with him, and his arguments remain true today. Since then, the Conservative Government had made some changes in the development of the Scottish Grand Committee. I was involved in discussions on those changes from 1979 onwards.

On the point about the dynamic of devolution and what it would do to a Scottish Parliament—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members shake their heads, but it is a serious matter because this has happened in other areas at other times in history. A Parliament, by its nature, always wants more power. How soon would a Scottish Parliament be flexing its constitutional muscles? How soon, claiming credence from the Claim of Right, would it be testing its own view of where sovereignty lay? I doubt whether its view would be that sovereignty lay with the Westminster Parliament. How soon would it be asking for greater powers and greater resources, probably in the knowledge that it would not get them? Then what? It would become the focus for Scottish discontent, the cockpit for national resentment and the arena in which to set Scot against English. That is the virus and the dynamic it would create—it would tear at the bonds that hold this United Kingdom together.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): How does the right hon. Gentleman's argument square with the view of the former Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher, that, if the Scottish people wanted to assert their rights, use their sovereignty and determine their independence as their preferred option, no impediment should be placed in the way of their achieving that objective? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with that? How does he square it with his argument?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman makes my point for me, because that is precisely what a Scottish Parliament would argue—that sovereignty rests not with Westminster, as the Secretary of State said, but with the people of Scotland.

That is not all. The proposals, which were put before us last week, leave a dangerously unbalanced constitutional position within the United Kingdom. The envisaged reduction in the over-representation of Scotland at Westminster may help a little, but I frankly tell the Secretary of State that it is an alarmingly long way down the road. I suspect that it is the price of loyalty from his Back Benchers.

We must continue asking what will be the role of Scottish Members at Westminster. In logic, why should they still be able to vote on matters affecting English schools and English hospitals when they will not have the right to vote on those matters as they affect Scotland? Why should they decide those matters for my constituents when they cannot decide them for their own constituents? Why should a Scottish Member be able to be the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and decide individual spending programmes for England when he will not be able to do so for Scotland?

Does the Secretary of State really believe that that position is sustainable and that a quiescent England will somehow not notice the proposed constitutional travesty and inequality of treatment?

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): As my right hon. Friend is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench, perhaps he cannot hear the sotto voce remarks of Scottish National Members, who are saying, "We don't want to come."

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making up for the fact that my hearing is becoming poorer as I get older. He has also reinforced the point that I was making. Scottish nationalists are supporting a Scottish Parliament because they believe that it will become the sovereign Parliament of Scotland. The intention and policy of the Scottish National party is to create an independent Scotland.

My argument, however, is not with the Scottish nationalists—like them, I believe that the Government's proposals will achieve their goal—but with the Secretary of State, who tells us that the Government's proposals will secure the Union. I profoundly disagree with him on that belief, because there is nothing in precedent to suggest that that would be the consequence.

The proposals contain a frightening potential to set Scot against English and English against Scot. Far from binding together, the proposals will unbind; far from strengthening relations, they will undermine them; far from stabilising our constitution, they will unbalance and destabilise its very foundations.

For those of us who cherish the United Kingdom and believe that its great amalgam of nations, cultures, traditions and skills has been and can again be a force for immense good, the proposals are a nightmarish beginning of its unravelling. The proposals threaten the United Kingdom, and we oppose them.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Does the right hon. Gentleman care to predict the date on which he thinks that Germany, having created its länder, will break into several independent nations?

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Lady studies the position in Germany, she will discover that the White Paper does not make comparable proposals for the United Kingdom. If she believes that the proposals are for the maintenance and sustenance of the Union, she should ask herself why the nationalist parties in both Wales and Scotland support them. Have those parties suddenly converted to the idea of the United Kingdom, or do they know—as I know—what the proposals will lead to?

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, once a Scottish Parliament is up and running in Scotland, the Conservative party in Scotland will put forward no more candidates for seats at Westminster?

Mr. Ancram: I am not sure that I understand even the purpose of that question. We have consistently said that we do not want the situation to arise. Before 11 September, we will be arguing that the proposals will lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. On 11 September, we will ask the people to examine the Government's half-baked proposals. I believe that people in Scotland understand the value of the United Kingdom to Scotland, and I do not believe that they will lightly sow the seeds of its destruction. I also do not believe that they will want the voice and influence of Scotland to be diminished in the United Kingdom, and that would be the consequence of the White Paper's proposals.

We have been told—we have already discussed the matter today—that the post of Secretary of State will be maintained—but to do what? The Secretary of State said that the post will be changed quite radically. Having lost all his powers to a Scottish Parliament, however, what clout will he have in Cabinet? What influence will he have on the wider scene? The White Paper states that his role will be "promoting communication" between the Scottish and Westminster Governments. What does that mean? Is it a euphemism for a glorified message boy?

The truth is that, in politics and in government, one punches one's weight. If the proposals are implemented, the Secretary of State will have no weight, no punch and no influence. Scotland's historic voice at the centre of

[Mr. Ancram]

government will effectively be gone. When, inevitably—as my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said—the political colours in Edinburgh and London are different, even the role of "promoting communication" will come into question.

Moreover, it will not be long before Scotland's voice in the House becomes very much less. Fewer Scottish Members will not strengthen Scotland's voice. The inevitable diminishing of the role of Scottish Members in the House, to meet the needs of constitutional balance, will lead to further marginalisation. The reality of the proposals—far from the Prime Minister's promise in the White Paper of giving Scotland an "exciting new role" within the United Kingdom—will be an undermining of the considerable role that Scotland now plays. That would be bad for Scotland and bad for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Perhaps my right hon. Friend is being too generous in his description of the role of a post-devolution Secretary of State for Scotland, because the White Paper's funding formula almost sets in stone the amount of money that will go to Scotland. In considering devolution, should we not re-examine the Barnett formula? I have spoken to Scots in my constituency who wonder why Scots in Dorset receive less money than Scottish—or English—people living in Scotland. Why should there be greater per capita spending in Scottish parliamentary constituencies than in English ones?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. I have one or two questions myself on financing and on the Barnett formula, but, before I ask them, I should like to deal with Scotland's future role in Europe.

We have been told that Ministers of the Scottish Executive will have a specific role in Europe, even if Scotland does not have a voice in the United Kingdom. The Secretary of State shakes his head. He obviously does not believe that Scotland will have such a role in Europe.

The White Paper, however, tells us that Ministers of the Scottish Executive will be involved in formulating UK policy positions; supporting and advancing the single United Kingdom negotiating line; working as a United Kingdom team; and, when appropriate, speaking in Councils for the United Kingdom. That is pure political unreality—based, I suspect, on an assumption that there will somehow be a permanent new Labour majority in both England and Scotland, working cosily hand in hand.

What will happen, however, when there are different political colours and perspectives, as inevitably there will be? How likely is it that there will be agreement on a common United Kingdom policy position? What will happen to Scotland's position if there is no agreement? Will Scotland's case effectively be unrepresented in Councils, as it cannot be under current arrangements? What will happen if, politics apart, there are conflicting interests between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom on a European matter? How will Scotland's voice be heard?

By what right will a Scottish Minister from the Scottish Executive speak for the United Kingdom? We are told that it will be done by agreement. How often is such agreement likely to be given? How will such a Minister answer to the United Kingdom Parliament—of which he will be neither a Member nor a Minister—for what he has said on behalf of the United Kingdom? The matter is a mess and a muddle, and we have received no answers to our questions about it—because, I suspect, it is irresolvable. The proposal is part of a sales pitch to win support at the referendum, but it does not add up, and the people of Scotland should know that before 11 September.

In reality, Scotland's voice in the Council of Ministers would be considerably lessened after implementation of the proposals. Scotland would be further marginalised, and greater would be the consequent resentment in Scotland. We would be left with such extraordinary anomalies as allowing Scottish Members to vote on abortion but not on capital punishment in the United Kingdom Parliament. Ultimately, such anomalies can only further marginalise Scotland within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Salmond: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: Yes, but it will be the last intervention in my speech.

Mr. Salmond: I am interested in the right hon. Gentleman's comments on Scotland's role in Europe, because it is an important matter. Can he tell us the percentage—to the nearest 10 per cent.—of times that Scottish Office Ministers attended Council of Ministers meetings? Was it 10, 20, 50 or 60 per cent? Does he know?

Mr. Ancram: I do not have the answer to that question to hand, but I know from my experience as a Minister in the Scottish Office and in the Northern Ireland Office that, when interests were at stake, Ministers were present, they were consulted and had a common view. The point that I am making is that if there is a differing view—if the United Kingdom position cannot be in line with that of the Scottish Parliament—the Scottish Parliament's voice would be unrepresented, and so would Scotland.

The United Kingdom would be threatened, Scotland would be marginalised and, on top of that, Scots would be worse off. The cost of the Scottish Parliament, including its setting up, would come off the Scottish block—£70 million in the first year and £30 million thereafter, we are told in the White Paper, but I suspect that that is a gross underestimate. Whether or not it is, that money will come from the block; it will come from the schools budget, the hospitals budget and the local government budget, all of which will have to pay for it.

We are told that the Barnett formula will be retained. Perhaps the Secretary of State will tell the House and the Scottish people how often the increasing levels of Scottish spending over the years were achieved by the Barnett formula alone. Is it true that, over time, the Barnett formula will equalise proportionate spending, rather than preserve currently favourable Scottish differentials? How will that mean more provision, as we are told it will, for the Scots under a devolved Parliament? Or will it all have to come from tax, from the can of tartan tax worms that we began to open last night? These are the central questions that must be fully answered before the referendum.

Indeed, there are many questions on tax that need to be answered. The Secretary of State said that he wants the Scots to have the facts. Well, let us see whether we can get some facts today. Previously, I have been singularly unsuccessful in getting any answers, and I fear that I am again pursuing the triumph of hope over experience.

Will the Secretary of State start by confirming that, contrary to the impression given so far, income tax is not the only element of the tax-varying powers being made available to a Scottish Parliament? In particular, will he—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman may want me to repeat that question so that he can answer it. Will he confirm that, contrary to the impression given so far, income tax is not the only element of the tax-varying powers being made available to a Scottish Parliament, and that other elements are available, too?

Mr. Dewar: What are they?

Mr. Ancram: I am asking the right hon. Gentleman. I return to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) and by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). It is a serious point that has yet to be addressed. Will the Secretary of State please tell the House what will happen if changes in income tax bands or fluctuations in the tax base, which decide how much 1p in the pound can secure in terms of revenue, create a situation in which a 3p increase in the standard rate of income tax will not produce the guaranteed and index-linked £450 million? How will that shortfall be met?

The Secretary of State made it absolutely clear in his statement and, indeed, in the White Paper, that the £450 million is guaranteed. If the tax take from a 3p increase in taxes does not produce that, a shortfall will occur and, under the guarantee, it will be made up. How is that to be done—by allowing for more than 3p to be raised in the pound, which we have been told is the maximum, or by another tax? It has to be one or the other. If not, the guarantee is false. I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman if he wants to explain how the shortfall will be met.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not for the right hon. Gentleman to invite anyone to intervene; it is for other hon. Members to ask to intervene. The right hon. Gentleman should continue with his speech.

Mr. Ancram: I take your point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but, having failed to get any answers from the Minister who I think is going to wind up the debate, I was hoping that I might have tempted the Secretary of State to intervene to give me an answer. It is something which the people of Scotland want to know. Either the guarantee is false or the shortfall will be made up by putting up the basic rate by more than 3p or through another tax. The Scottish people, who are worried about the 3p increase as it is, need to be told.

Mr. Dewar: It is poverty of imagination on the part of the right hon. Gentleman if he thinks that they are the only two possibilities. He might consider a 3p maximum on a similar tax but a differently constructed income tax base.

Mr. Ancram: We are now being told that there is going to be another tax.

Mr. Dewar: I suppose that it was unwise of me to rise to the bait, but the right hon. Gentleman was asking me to answer a hypothetical question. If, at some future date, the present band on which the maximum of 3p is levied does not produce the requisite revenue and some alternative has to be found, it does not necessarily mean raising the 3p rate. One might look for another income tax base on which the 3p could be levied to produce the rate.

Mr. Ancram: The only possible interpretation of that is that there is going to be a different tax banding in Scotland. That is not in the White Paper.

There is a simple question to which the Scottish people need the answer. In a recession, for example, when there are fewer pounds to be taxed, if I can put it that way, and the 3p rate does not raise the £450 million calculated in the White Paper, there will be a shortfall. According to the guarantee that has been given, that shortfall is going to be met. I ask again, where is the money to come from? We are told that it will come from another arrangement relating to some other form of income tax. We want to know what that new form will be. We need answers to such essential questions.

I move on, however. Will the Secretary of State confirm that a Scottish Parliament with control over aggregate external finance and over the non-domestic rate and other local taxation could raise its own spending by passing the burden on to individuals and businesses through higher local taxes? For instance, could a Scottish Parliament retain some of the aggregate external finance for its own purposes, thereby pressurising local councils to increase council tax? Could it restructure the uniform business rate to achieve the same result? Or, could it, as I understand from the White Paper, introduce a new local tax—say, a sales tax—in order to justify retaining resources for itself? If it could do these things, are they not back-door methods for a Scottish Parliament to raise taxes even if the second question in the referendum has been answered no?

Mr. Dewar: I am genuinely curious, so may I ask the right hon. Gentleman a question? Can Westminster do those things? If the answer is yes, should we abolish Westminster as an unpleasant conspiracy?

Mr. Ancram: The right hon. Gentleman has made my case for me. He has now compared the powers of the Scottish Parliament with the powers available to this Parliament. This Parliament certainly has powers to raise various other forms of taxation, but we have been told that the Scottish Parliament's tax-varying powers would relate only to income tax. It is becoming clear that in the thickets of the White Paper, well hidden from the casual reader, is the potential for many more tartan taxes than just income tax. Where potential taxes exist, one can be sure that in due course they will happen.

Scotland would be the highest taxed part of the United Kingdom, with devastating effects on individuals, jobs, business and inward investment. The cost of collecting

[Mr. Ancram]

and paying the taxes would be punitive. It would also create great internal unfairness. Pensioners would pay the increased income tax while those who have saved and invested would not. Someone who lives in Berwick and works in Kelso will not pay the tax; someone who lives in Coldstream and works in Kelso will. Someone spending 185 days a year in Scotland will pay the increased tax, whereas someone spending only 180 days in Scotland will not. What happens if one's job takes one backwards and forwards across the border on a daily basis? The situation is mind-boggling. We need answers to the questions arising from the can of tartan tax worms, and we need them before the Scots are asked to vote on 11 September.

One thing is clear: the Scots will be worse off. As I said last Thursday, Scots will pay through the nose for devolution. It will cost to be Scots.

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West) *rose—*

Mr. Ancram: I am not giving way again. I have spoken for long enough, and I want to conclude.

Last week, I warned that the people of Scotland were facing a dark, cold night. Just how dark and cold is becoming daily more apparent, as the small print of the muddled proposals is examined. It is a matter not just of what is in the proposals, but of what is not—it is the failure to answer questions on Europe, on tax and on many other crucial issues; it is the rush to get the referendum through before the Scottish people wake up to what is being done to them; and it is the implicit dishonesty in implying that people can vote for the package to save the United Kingdom at the same time as voting for it to break up the United Kingdom.

But the dawn beyond the night is no less cold, for it would find Scotland, having left the wider stage which historically it has bestrode so famously, withdrawn into itself, and inevitably resentful. It would find the Scottish people worse off, and it would find the United Kingdom torn apart.

The White Paper and the project that it sets out will end in tears—tears for the Scots and tears for the United Kingdom. I firmly reject it and I call on the people of Scotland to do the same before it is too late.

4.59 pm

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I find it sad to hear the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) talking about things ending in tears. I wish that he was more constructive and had a greater interest in putting forward ideas that would help to improve some aspects of the White Paper.

I shall start on a light-hearted note. The Secretary of State sometimes accuses me of being over-romantic and of looking back too often. I wonder who chose 11 September as the date for the referendum? Was it a tiny bit of romance in his heart? It is, of course, the anniversary of the battle of Stirling bridge.

Mr. Salmond: Braveheartish.

Mrs. Michie: We all know about the film "Braveheart" and how everybody enjoyed Mel Gibson. I certainly did. It has made a tremendous impression in America. Some 6,000 members of the American Society of Travel Agents will arrive in Glasgow on 7 September. They will make their way to Stirling for the 11 September celebrations. I hope that they will meet many thousands of Scots going to vote in the referendum.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: So do I.

Mrs. Michie: They will be going to vote yes, yes.

Mr. Dalyell: Am I doing the hon. Lady an injustice by suggesting that the implications of what she has said are profoundly anti-English?

Mrs. Michie: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman should think that. I never mentioned the English. I was merely saying that 11 September was a worthwhile date to have chosen for the referendum. Perhaps I shall hear from Ministers whether it was chosen by chance or whether the Secretary of State decided that it was a good date because of the historical background.

Mr. Salmond: I have a helpful intervention. Does the hon. Lady recall, as I do, that, when the Conservatives were in government, they almost proposed a Trafalgar day? I thought that that was a pretty silly proposal, but I do not think that I attacked them for being anti-French.

Mrs. Michie: That was a helpful intervention. I remember that suggestion. I reject what the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said.

I should like to follow up the questions that the Secretary of State was asked after his statement about the building that will house the Scottish Parliament. As the White Paper rightly states, it

> "must be of such a quality, durability and civic importance as to reflect the Parliament's status and operational needs".

I am glad that the Secretary of State confirmed to me during Scottish Question Time that there were various options, including a new building, if a suitable site can be found.

I have two points to make about that. The first involves the funding of the building. No doubt we shall be accused of wasting money on a new building for the Parliament. It should be funded from three sources. Obviously, there should be some public funding, because it will be a building belonging to the people of Scotland. However, I see no reason why private money should not contribute to the project and I wonder whether it would be eligible for millennium funding. The dome is to cost between £500 million and £800 million.

Mr. Salmond: More.

Mrs. Michie: Well, up, up, up the cost has gone. The title was changed from the millennium project to the millennium experience, which was fine. I know that various millennium projects are planned to come to fruition in various parts of Scotland, but there is no single big idea. I suggest that the new Parliament could be our big idea—the Scottish experience.

My second point is about the design. I welcome the prospect of an open competition for the design if we choose to have a new building. I have a specific request for the Secretary of State and the Minister. The design should be chosen not just by an architectural hierarchy and politicians. It is important to try to involve the people of Scotland in choosing the building. Perhaps they could choose from a short list of six. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members are being extremely unfair to the hon. Lady. She is addressing the House and she should not be interrupted. [HON. MEMBERS: "She is not addressing the issue."] Order. She should not be interrupted. That is the end of that.

Mrs. Michie: I am not sure why Conservative Members are trying to interrupt. I am addressing what is in the White Paper and trying to make some constructive proposals, which I have not heard from any of them.

The Scottish people should be involved in choosing whatever building is put forward from the competition. How can we do that? [HON. MEMBERS: "Have a referendum."] No. I was about to say that we have had enough proposals for referendums. We could involve the television companies, which would put the buildings on screen, with computer simulations of the inside. The Scottish people could then give their preferences in a phone-in. Similar exercises have been carried out before. This is not just my idea. Many people have told me that they do not want any carbuncles in Scotland. We want a building that we will like and appreciate. The choice of the people is not always the same as that of the architectural purists.

Mr. Godman: One of the most recent international architectural competitions that we have had in Scotland was for the new museum in Chambers street, Edinburgh. Was the hon. Lady unhappy with the way in which the design for that building was chosen?

Mrs. Michie: No, I was not. I would be happy if we consulted the people of Scotland. I do not know whether they would be interested in bothering to tell us what they would like, but we should at least try.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The hon. Lady has spoken for eight minutes about the building in which the Parliament will be housed. Does she not think that that devalues this debate on the constitutional future of our nation?

Mrs. Michie: I do not want to argue with the hon. Gentleman. I have already said that I am trying to make constructive suggestions. There is a chapter in the White Paper about the housing of the Scottish Parliament. The hon. Gentleman will no doubt be able to raise other aspects later.

There are many aspects of the White Paper that we welcome, particularly the electoral arrangements as spelled out in chapter 8. Those arrangements are essential, as the Secretary of State has reiterated. We worked hard to persuade the Scottish Constitutional Convention to adopt a fair electoral system and we want to ensure that all parts of the country are properly represented.

One of the main criticisms of the Scotland Act 1978 was that, with the first-past-the-post system, the Parliament would be dominated by the central belt. It was said in 1978—it may still be said—that the Parliament would be dominated by Glasgow trade unionists and Edinburgh lawyers. Each geographical area can now be confident that it will have proper representation and that its voice will be heard.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) has expressed concerns about other parties fulfilling their commitment to try to achieve gender balance within the Scottish Parliament. I assure her that the Scottish Liberal Democrats are trying to achieve that aim within a legal structure. I hope that the hon. Lady is reassured by that commitment.

Mrs. Fyfe: I am glad to hear that reassurance. I understand that the Scottish National party has taken the same position; I hope that that is correct. That leaves only the Scottish Conservatives who are benighted, as usual.

Mrs. Michie: I cannot answer for the Scottish Conservatives, although I think that they are beginning to understand that, with proportional representation, a gender balance and a Scottish Parliament, they are getting a lifeline to politics in Scotland. Without those things, they would be in the wilderness for ever.

Conservative Members have gone on and on about the additional list system being in the hands of party hierarchies. That would be wrong as well, certainly for the Liberal Democrats. Members of the Scottish Parliament will be vetted and selected to stand, as are Members of this Parliament, by the party members in the Euro-constituencies. Those selected will then be on the list. It is not a question of my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), the leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, saying, "You, you, you and you will be on the party list." People will be chosen by local party members, as they are chosen at the moment to stand for first-past-the-post seats. I hope that we shall hear no more about patronage and party hacks going on lists.

The White Paper makes it clear that the Parliament will be responsible for further and higher education, including policy, funding, the functions of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and student support. That is absolutely right. I am concerned, however, that, as a result of the Dearing report, the Government may legislate on the charging of tuition fees, which should be left to the Scottish Parliament. The Parliament will also want to ensure that Scottish four-year degree students will not be disadvantaged.

It has been proposed that students should pay £1,000 a year, with the loan being repayable at a later date. That flies in the face of the Scottish educational tradition, which has been firmly based on the belief that the best possible investment is in our people and our children. Education has always been regarded as the one opportunity that should be afforded to all our youngsters, and as the one boost that can give them a lift out of deprived or disadvantaged circumstances and give them a real chance to make their way in life. Education is important to us.

Running up a considerable debt is a frightening prospect even for the reasonably well-off. It goes against a principle that many of us were brought up to believe in—that we should not incur debt and that we should never purchase anything until we were confident of being able to pay for it. That is a wise dictum. The Scottish Parliament may want to look at that and at other methods of funding higher education. I also hope that there will be no move to do anything about university rectors in Scotland. It is a matter for a Scottish Parliament to decide.

[Mrs. Michie]

I will try to get home the point about tax to Conservative Members. The Scottish Parliament is being given only tax-varying powers, so I do not understand what all the fuss is about. The Scottish Parliament is being given a minimal power. That power will be used only if a particular party has said that it will do so in its election manifesto and if the people then vote for that party. If the people vote for that party to go into government, the power will be used, because it will be the will of the people of Scotland. The power makes the Parliament more responsible and accountable, and that is why we must secure a substantial yes vote to the second question. I do not understand why Conservative Members think that a Scottish Parliament will act against its own people in terms of business and tax. Why would it do that?

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr. Fox: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Michie: I will give way to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox).

Dr. Fox: At columns 416 and 417 of yesterday's *Hansard*, when asked whether he thought that the second question was fraudulent because, even if the answer was no, the Parliament would still have tax-raising powers, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said that it was a fraudulent question to that extent. Does the hon. Lady agree with her hon. Friend?

Mrs. Michie: I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland was saying that we would have preferred to have either no referendum or a referendum with just one question. I think that my hon. Friend was referring to the fact that we did not want a second question.

The White Paper raises a number of questions about the reserved powers, which are a bit bizarre. Under the heading "Certain other matters" on page 11, there is a list that includes the licensing of theatres and cinemas. I do not understand why that is included; perhaps the Minister can tell us later. The list also includes gambling. Does that mean casinos or betting shops? Why should they involve reserved powers? I do not see why this House should have a superior authority by which it can dictate to Scotland how it handles moral and ethical matters. We shall have to return to those matters, especially when the relevant legislation comes to the House.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow is right to say that Ministers will meet the Law Society of Scotland, because there are a number of questions to discuss. I am not a legal person, so I do not want to go into that area now.

Conservative Members make much of the merit of the Union, and they seem to believe that it is more important than democracy itself. Many people maintain, however, that the Union cannot be all that it is cracked up to be if it is unable to evolve, to adapt and to be flexible enough to meet the aspirations of its component parts. If we want to secure the unity of the United Kingdom, we should move towards a federal structure. I believe that we shall do so in the end. It has been Liberal Democrat policy for many years and I know that the hon. Member for Linlithgow agrees with me. It is the answer to all the West Lothian questions and those relating to tax and fiscal powers. It is how the majority of countries work.

We need only look at America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Spain and Germany. Who gave Germany a federal Government after the war? We did. Who gave Germany a fair electoral system? We did. Yet, until now, not one jot or tittle of power has been allowed to leave this place. That is why I warmly welcome the White Paper. Although it is about devolution, it is much better than I expected, particularly having heard the rather chilling words of the Home Secretary when he said that power devolved was power retained. I commend the Government for having stuck closely to and, in some instances, improved on the proposals from the Scottish Constitutional Convention.

We are home rulers and, as I have said, the ideal is a federal structure.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Michie: No.

With a federal structure, this place would no longer dictate to Wales and Scotland; rather, there would be agreement on what powers each level of government would carry out.

Sovereignty as it is understood here is quite different from how we understand it north of the border where the people are sovereign—not any one person, body of people or Government, particularly as Governments are always elected on a minority vote.

The Conservative party in general and the official Opposition in particular demean themselves by their carping criticism. They could try to recover their political antennae, which have not been in evidence for many years, by speaking to real people, and not just among themselves, and trying to understand the deep passion, the desire of the hearts and heads of so many Scottish people who, though the generations, have dedicated their lives to the re-establishment of our Scottish Parliament. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) put it so eloquently last week, many people have lived and died without seeing it come to fruition. We, their children, have continued in that desire, and our children know that they must carry the banner until the day comes when Scotland can once again hold her head up high with confidence and pride as a partner in the United Kingdom, Europe and the world.

5.22 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I am not given to exaggerated language, but frankly I was shocked by the opening of the speech by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie). Let me explain to the House why. She referred to the battle of Stirling bridge some 700 years ago. She said that it was a light-hearted reference. Why did the hon. Lady start a speech in a crucial debate with that light-hearted reference when she knew very well that it was to a battle of Scots and English?

In 35 years of contesting elections with the Scottish National party—the leader of that party will bear me out in this, if in nothing else—I have never said that representatives of the Scottish National party are anti-English. Nevertheless, that will be a serious concern once Pandora's box is open. I beg the hon. Lady to be careful in using that argument, because there are hundreds of thousands of English people working in Scotland and well over 1 million Scots working in England. They see it as one United Kingdom.

We are on very sensitive ground. The Liberal Democrats had great influence both in the convention and on the White Paper. In one sense, it is their White Paper as well as that of my right hon. Friends. Liberal Democrats can claim great influence on the White Paper; therefore, it behoves them to be ever more careful about what can be described as the law of unintended consequences. I beg the hon. Lady to be careful.

In his penultimate remarks, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the Leader of the Opposition. He took great comfort in the fact that the Leader of the Opposition had made statements along the lines that, if there were a Parliament, it would be permanent. I understand how the position has arisen, but how long will it last? Whatever the Leader of the Opposition or any politician says, how long can 72 or 58 hon. Members, or even one hon. Member, sent by electors north of the border be able to vote on matters relating to England, but be unable to vote on matters relating to Scotland? How long can that endure?

My problem with the White Paper is this: how long can a Scottish Parliament last in the form—or anything like the form—in which it has been proposed? People who propose constitutional change must submit proposals that at least have a chance of enduring. After careful study of the White Paper, I fear that there is no possibility of its proposals lasting a decade or more. Therefore, it behoves us to argue for proposals that at least have the possibility of enduring.

Once again, it comes down to something has been recognised for a very long time, certainly since the last years of the last century. At some risk, I quote Carson, who said in 1912:

> "We see, as Irish Ministers saw in 1800, that there can be no permanent resting place between complete union and total separation . . . If there were no other objection to the establishment of a separate government in Dublin, it would be impossible because legislative autonomy can only be coupled with financial independence".

That is part of the problem which was reinforced by careful reading of the White Paper, by the reaction to Edinburgh castle and, not least, by the treatment of the subject by *The Scotsman* on that Friday morning. I fear that, at the end of the day, it comes back to the same question: the choice between something indistinguishable from the status quo and something indistinguishable from the general views of the Scottish National party. I stick to it, but the referendum really ought to be on two questions: "I wish to remain in Britain" and "I wish to be part of a Scottish state separate from England".

Mr. Donald Gorrie (Edinburgh, West): Is it the case that, in recent history, the House has passed more laws relating to Scotland against the will of the majority of Scottish Members than laws affecting England against the will of the majority of English Members?

Mr. Dalyell: That is certainly right. Frankly, there is one answer to that: a separate Scottish state. Anybody who thinks that an Assembly in Edinburgh could have protected us from Margaret Thatcher's poll tax is wrong. There is no way that an Assembly—

Mr. Gorrie: That is not true.

Mr. Dalyell: There is no way that an Assembly could have protected us.

Mr. Gorrie *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Dalyell: The hon. Gentleman will be able to speak later and I must be careful about time. I want to ask some specific questions.

One item in the White Paper which bothers me greatly is the statement:

> "There will be provision for transferring further matters to and from the reserve list by Order in Council, which would be approved by both Parliaments."

That might sound harmless enough, but in simple, straightforward language those 25 words mean that, at any time, areas reserved for Westminster in the 1997 White Paper can be picked up at will by the Scottish Parliament. I do not envisage a Government in London feeling that there would be any point in challenging Edinburgh on such demands, but they will inevitably arise and, sooner rather than later, there will be more and more. Every shortcoming will, of course, be ascribed to a shortage of money from Westminster. We are on a motorway without exit to a destination that may not have been intended but is indistinguishable from a separate state.

I turn to the precise questions of the Law Society of Scotland. My hon. Friends on the Front Bench have the document to which I am referring. The first question has already been put. The second group of questions is:

> "Why are the judicial appointments of the Lord President and the Lord Justice Clerk being dealt with on a different basis from other judicial appointments (paragraph 2.4)? Is there room for a judicial appointments commission in the devolved scheme?"

The third group of questions is:

> "What solution is proposed in the event that the advice given to the Scottish Parliament by the Scottish Executive Law Officers (the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General) and that given to the UK Parliament by the Scottish Law Officer, is different? What will the status of the Scottish Law Officer be? To which Department will he be accountable?"

There are other questions, such as:

> "Will the convention that two Scottish Lords of Appeal in Ordinary should sit on Scottish cases apply to the proposal?"

Those questions are in the possession of the Scottish Office. It is important that they are answered before the referendum.

I turn briefly to money. I shall read out an unsolicited and short letter from Mr. Robert Hislop of 79, Belsyde court, Linlithgow. It says:

> "Dear Mr. Dalyell,
>
> I am an employee of Hewlett Packard and based in South Queensferry, but since I work for Sales and Service, the head office is in Bracknell.
>
> My tax office is therefore in Southampton and not in Scotland.
>
> My concern is regarding tax and devolution.
>
> Like everybody else I pay UK tax, but if devolved powers ever arise does that mean I will be required to pay an extra 'Scottish' tax over and above the UK tax?

> Personally I cannot see myself being better off than I am at the moment and will probably be financially worse off. Someone has to pay for the infrastructure, extra civil servants, MPs, etc. I think the man in the street, and I include myself, is ignorant of what the true cost will be if the vote on September 11 is Yes Yes."

I would like some kind of response to that letter, because there are many like it. There is widespread concern. At some stage, the nine questions on tax that I asked in the debate yesterday, reported in *Hansard* at columns 414 to 416, should be answered.

I should like to ask about the role of the Secretary of State. Who will be responsible for oil taxation? This is of vital concern to Scotland. It will be decided around the Cabinet table in London, where Scotland's voice might be rather weaker than it has been hitherto. A Parliament may be more representative of Scottish opinion than any one Minister, but what use will that be when it cannot always make representations where it counts? There is considerable worry on matters of great consequence to our electors that it will be rather different when it comes to the Cabinet table, where key decisions are made.

My hon. Friends will have seen the concerns of Scottish and Newcastle in the business section of today's edition of *The Scotsman*. That company represents many employees, some of whom are in the Linlithgow constituency. I hope that there will be some response to the concerns that it has raised. There is a problem when an economy that is interlinked and has come together over all this time is in some sense, to use the phrase of Mr. Iain MacWhirter, "dewired". The dewiring of an economy is a real problem.

There are those of us who have taken and are taking a different view on a whole number of matters. I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) last night. He is, as he put it courteously, a real friend. His speech was indistinguishable from that of someone who wanted something that was tantamount to a separate Scotland. I hardly think that he would deny that. He is an honourable man. I do not know whether he is here. Ah, I see that he is. The position that he took is absolutely honourable, but we cannot have our cake and eat it; we cannot ride two horses.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): My hon. Friend says that we cannot ride two horses. Does he remember the famous expression of Jimmy Maxton: "If you can't ride two horses, you shouldn't be in the bloody circus."

Mr. Dalyell: I do not think that the situation is a bloody circus. I think that it is extremely serious for people in Scotland. We may take some things light-heartedly, but the unintended consequences of what we do will be with us for a very long time.

I fear that, on 11 September, the Scottish people and people in Scotland have to choose between something that is very like the present British position, with all its shortcomings, and is indistinguishable from the present British state—some of us think that it is worth while in general terms, although there are of course shortcomings—and something that has been described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) as a "mystery tour". The mystery tour would end up very much along the lines of what the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) would like. If that is the decision of the people in Scotland, so be it.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East that it is no good criticising me on this subject—well, he can criticise me as much as he wishes—when all I am doing is being a messenger of the reality that we now face. That reality is whether we want to remain part of Britain or whether we want to be part of a state that is separate from England. That is the choice.

5.39 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), because he touched on the theme that I wish to develop today. It arises from the words of the Secretary of State for Scotland in the glossy White Paper:

> "The Government's aim is a . . . settlement which will be good both for Scotland and the United Kingdom."

The debate has been incomplete up to now—both today and previously. It has been incomplete because the voice of the bulk of the United Kingdom—the people of England, of course—has been silent. We have heard endlessly about what the people of Scotland may want and, in a different context, about what the people of Wales may want, but when will the people of England be asked what they think?

It is bizarre to debate the future of the United Kingdom when the voice of the people who are the bulk of that United Kingdom is silent. The people of England are assumed to be compliant in what is going on. However, I agree with the hon. Member for Linlithgow that the proposed solution is incomplete or partial, because it is not firmly founded. If the Scottish people, who have been given a voice, vote on 11 September for a Parliament with its tax-raising powers, we will know what they have to say, but we will still know nothing about how the English people feel.

Mr. Salmond: That cannot be true. During the election campaign, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), the then Prime Minister, said that the devolution issue transcended the election. If that is true, did not the people of England speak on the issue—and many others—in the election, according to the former Prime Minister?

Mr. Forth: That is the mandate approach. It is often claimed by Labour Members, and indeed by other hon. Members, that we know what people want from the outcome of the general election. All that the people said in the general election was that they no longer wanted a Conservative Government; they wanted a Labour Government. That is clear and I accept that verdict—I can do no less. However, I am not sure that we know what the people of England think about proposals for a Parliament in Scotland.

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that this issue goes back a long time, to 1886 and to the forming of the Scottish National party in 1934? Is he further aware that two future Conservative Prime Ministers, one in 1968 and the other in 1970, advanced proposals for a Scottish Parliament?

Mr. Forth: I have a certain awareness of those matters, although I am not always as impressed as I should be when hon. Members quote former Conservative Prime Ministers at me. Perhaps I should work on that. We are considering the current position, which is that a small number of people in the United Kingdom are being asked whether they want something for themselves. A large number of people in the United Kingdom are not being asked at all.

That leads me to the point made by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), that several possibilities are not being considered. One possibility, which may end up as an attractive solution, is a Parliament for England. As the hon. Lady rightly pointed out, that would resolve the West Lothian question, and it should be considered. But why are the people of England not being asked whether they want a Parliament at the same time as the people of Scotland and Wales are asked what they want? That is what is so wrong with the debate. It is completely lopsided. The tail is wagging the dog, or is attempting to do so, and that is politically dangerous. If we proceed, the solution will be narrow and shallow and, therefore, its effectiveness and permanence will be open to challenge.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government have shown a lack of courage in being unwilling to consult all Scottish people in the referendum on 11 September? He said that the English people will not be consulted, but nor will Scottish people who for the time being do not live in Scotland. In the general election only 13 weeks ago today, people who live in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Spain—anywhere one likes to mention—were consulted, but Scottish people who do not live in Scotland at the moment will not be consulted in the referendum. That shows the Government's fear.

Mr. Forth: It pains me to say it, but I am not sure that I agree with my hon. Friend. I have always taken the view that, if people freely opt to leave one country to live in another, they must give up most, if not all, of their say in what happens in the country they have left. I am more comfortable with the residency requirement than is my hon. Friend.

Mr. Gray: I wish to raise a residency issue which was overlooked in the White Paper. A Scottish soldier who is based in England is 100 per cent. Scottish and fights in the tartan, but he may have registered his vote in, for example, North Wiltshire. Does my right hon. Friend feel the same way about a Scottish soldier who has been disfranchised by the Government as he does about other Scots who are resident in England?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has made an important distinction. I said that my previous reply applied to people who had voluntarily left Scotland. If someone is posted out of Scotland because of his occupation, that is different. However, I do not wish to get involved in that debate, because I wish my remarks to be brief.

My next point is about money. I am sure that all hon. Members have studied carefully the useful research paper produced by the Library entitled "Public Expenditure in Scotland and Wales". On page eight, it reveals that identifiable general Government expenditure on education is £588 per resident in England and £791 in Scotland. On health and personal social services, the amount spent per resident is £806 in England and £989 in Scotland. The Scots are—as we know—privileged people within the United Kingdom, and that must leave the English wondering what is going on. The Scots are privileged to have a Secretary of State and a Scottish Office—for which there is no English equivalent—yet the English help to pay for higher Government expenditure on the Scots.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one of the examples of the privilege of the Scots is that we got the poll tax a whole year earlier? We are all very grateful for that.

Mr. Forth: I cannot see the relevance of those remarks to the point I am trying to make. Yes, the Scots had the privilege of getting the excellent poll tax earlier than we did in England. I regret that the poll tax was not successful, and I hope that we return to it in a different form in the future.

Ms Squire: On the basis of what the right hon. Gentleman has just said about the poll tax, he clearly does not represent the views of the majority of people of England or Scotland. The people of England protested fiercely against the poll tax and showed their opposition to it, so he clearly speaks only for a minority.

Mr. Forth: I do not want to get bogged down in this argument, and I suspect that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, might not want me to either. The majority of people did not protest against the poll tax; a minority of rabble protested against it. The then Government were overly impressed and, regrettably, rather than try to make the poll tax work, as we could and should have done, we decided not to proceed with it.

Mr. Salmond: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Forth: No, I want to get on with the point about money.

If we are to make some sort of fresh start in constitutional terms, we should at least attempt to level the playing field in terms of money, taxation and expenditure as well. When the English people begin to realise the extent to which the Scots are already financially privileged, and then see the Scots over-represented, with all the implications for the West Lothian question about which we have heard so often in this regard, I am afraid that that will give rise to the possibility of English resentment or a backlash. I would rather see that dealt with properly now than left festering, as will inevitably happen if the proposals are approved through both the referendum and legislation.

Sir Robert Smith: I am concerned about the language coming from Conservative Members. Do they want to foment or mollify English resentment?

Mr. Forth: I would certainly seek to mollify English resentment, and the first stage is to give the English a voice on this matter. Surely the hon. Gentleman would accept that the best way to bring about English resentment is not to consult the English, not to ask them what they want, and to make no provision for the English of the kind being made for the Scots and the Welsh. That is the problem. By proceeding as they are, the Government risk an English resentment which will serve us all badly in the future if we are not careful.

[Mr. Forth]

My final point in the United Kingdom context has not been commented on much so far in this debate. The proposals in the White Paper are for a unicameral legislative system for Scotland. I understand that the Scots will have one chamber, with a rather peculiar election system, which will be able to legislate over a wide range of issues for the Scots. The English presumably will still have their laws made by the Westminster system: a House of Commons with Scottish representation, a revising Chamber—the House of Lords—and Royal Assent. The Welsh will have yet another system of law making, whereby their primary laws will still be made here at Westminster, but a Welsh Assembly will deal with secondary legislation.

We now have the prospect of three totally different law-making processes within the United Kingdom, which is yet another reason why the proposals threaten to fracture the United Kingdom and send its different component parts off in different directions. That is the underlying danger of the proposals. The procedure being adopted, the financial underpinnings and the constitutional differences that will be set up by the proposals all endanger the United Kingdom and the relationship between its constituent parts in a way that no one has yet been prepared to recognise. That is why I and many of my hon. Friends oppose the proposals. They will be opposed not only in Scotland and Wales but increasingly, for the reasons that I have given, in England. This is a tragedy, which it might not yet be too late to avoid.

5.53 pm

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): Given their speeches so far, Conservative Members are doing an excellent job in persuading the majority of people of the United Kingdom that we need devolution and constitutional change. I should like to say to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) that it is my clear impression that the majority of people of England decided that they wanted to change a system of government that had become increasingly ignorant and unwilling to listen to their views. They wanted the style of politics changed to one that would give them much more influence on decisions that affect their everyday lives.

I very much welcome the White Paper. I have long campaigned for it, although I freely admit not quite as long as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I was thinking today about what I could say in support of the White Paper which has not already been ably and eloquently said by other hon. Members. I decided to focus my remarks on how a Scottish Parliament will help bring about the constitutional change that will give all the people of the United Kingdom a much greater voice in decisions that affect their everyday lives, especially those whose voices were ignored or silenced under our system of government.

Mrs. Laing: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Squire: I shall certainly give way to the hon. Lady, who is clearly eager to stand for the Scottish Parliament.

Mrs. Laing: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, although it is not up to her to read my mind. I listened carefully to what she said. How will the proposals in the White Paper give my constituents in Epping Forest in Essex a greater say? That is what the hon. Lady suggested. It is a reasonable suggestion, but I do not see how the White Paper will increase my constituents' say.

Ms Squire: The hon. Lady demonstrates the blinkered tunnel vision so characteristic of Conservative Members. The White Paper is the first step in a process of constitutional change that will give a much greater voice to the constituents of Epping Forest, Elgin and elsewhere. [HON. MEMBERS: "How?"] Because it is the start of constitutional change in the way in which this country is governed. Five years as an hon. Member in this House have convinced me that, if there is one thing that I want to change, it is how the system of government has been allowed, over the past 18 years, so blatantly to ignore the voice of the majority of people throughout the United Kingdom.

Sir Robert Smith: One direct way in which constituents in Epping Forest and other English constituencies will benefit is that, once a Scottish Parliament has been set up, all the time taken in the House to scrutinise purely Scottish legislation will be freed up, so that we can scrutinise other legislation. I share the hon. Lady's optimism that the White Paper is the thin end of the wedge, and I hope that we shall see a federal system for the United Kingdom in the long run.

Ms Squire: I cannot not agree with the hon. Gentleman's last sentiment, but I should have thought that some hon. Members representing English constituencies might welcome not having to pack the Benches, as they have over the past 18 years of Conservative rule, to force through legislation that related solely to Scotland, against the wishes of the people of Scotland.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Squire: I shall continue my speech. The hon. Gentleman might then grasp why I am so much in favour of the proposals for a Scottish Parliament and of wider constitutional change.

I want a style and system of government that gives a much greater voice to those whose voices have too often been ignored by our political process: the unemployed; people on low incomes; and low-paid part-time workers, especially women. I became involved in politics because of my anger at the injustice whereby those who worked hard all their lives were given little recognition or reward for doing so, because they did not happen to speak with the right accent, live in the right part of town, or know the right people to have opportunities and doors opened to them.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Squire: No—

Mr. Swayne: Do, do.

Ms Squire: No, I wish to continue. If the hon. Gentleman wishes me to give way later, I may do so.

In particular, I have been angered by the way in which the contribution that women—both paid and unpaid carers—make to our society has been ignored by our parliamentary system and government. Many of my hon. Friends have sought to speak out and to make the voices heard of those who have often been ignored. We see these people every week, every month, in our surgeries—people who are at the end of their tether and have come to us desperately hoping that we can deal with their grievances.

However, for every person who comes to us, there are another 100 whose voices will never be heard. Many of my constituents are disfranchised by our present system of government in many ways. They do not have the contacts, the knowledge, the networks that would enable them to get something done about grievances that affect them and their families. They may feel deeply that they have been treated unfairly, but pressure in their everyday lives means that their complaints are often ignored and they get absolutely nowhere—for example, the 25 families who recently contacted me with their complaints about maternity services in Fife.

I see a Scottish Parliament as part of a beginning of constitutional change, which will empower the many, not the few. It will make politicians more accessible and more accountable to those whom they are elected to represent.

Mr. Grieve: If I understand the hon. Lady correctly—I have heard this from other hon. Members on the Government Benches—the advantages derived from Scottish devolution will be an example of what will happen elsewhere in the United Kingdom, as she spoke about it in the English context. Surely, if we are to have mature consideration of the total package, it would be wise for the House to know what mystery the Government have in store for England, as the remaining part of the United Kingdom to be dealt with, so that we can take an objective view of whether the proposals have any validity. One of the things to which we on the Opposition Benches object so much is that questions will be put to the Scottish and Welsh people in September, without their having any more idea than we have of what the total package will be.

Ms Squire: The hon. Gentleman does not appear to be aware of the different aspects of constitutional change that the majority of people in the United Kingdom elected the Government to carry out. The majority of people in the United Kingdom believed that politicians had lost touch with the reality of people's everyday lives. I want a system of government that increases participation and involvement, and enables far more people to make their voices heard.

I support a Scottish Parliament because it will change the face of politics. I support the White Paper, as it deals with the fact that, although Scotland has its own legislation, it has no legislature of its own. A Scottish Parliament will benefit the people of Scotland, because it will be able to legislate in the areas that are raised most frequently in our surgeries—such as housing, education, jobs and health. It will give the people of Scotland a much greater say over how public money is spent. It will, I hope, end for ever the situation that we have endured for so many years, in which a Secretary of State for Scotland and four Ministers, although voted in by a minority, have total control over how they spend £14.5 billion.

Any tax-raising power would be exercised only after debate and majority agreement. I am in no doubt that Scots who combined individual rights with collective responsibility would be more than willing to contribute more to the public purse if they were quite clear that that money would be spent on caring for the elderly, on providing more nursery provision and on increasing health services and housing.

Mr. Gray: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Squire: No. The hon. Gentleman has been on his feet more than once already.

A Scottish Parliament will enable much better accountability of public spending and easier and more detailed scrutiny by the public themselves.

A Scottish Parliament will help to change the face of politics. Although it is encouraging that there are now more than 100 women Members of Parliament in this place, I would certainly support a Scottish Parliament in which there was 50:50 representation and a much greater cross-section of all aspects of society. I want to see a Scottish Parliament that is far more open to those from ethnic minorities and to those with disabilities. I want to see a Scottish Parliament whose benches are full not only of social workers, lawyers and teachers, but of people who have been business men, sales representatives, cleaners, carers and caretakers—a broad cross-section of our society.

I want to see a Scottish Parliament that breaks the mould of the aggressive, confrontational, egotistical point-scoring that this place has symbolised for so long; a Parliament that promotes and encourages serious and informed debate on the issues that affect people's everyday lives. I want to see a system of government that closes the gap between what happens in this place and what directly affects the people of the United Kingdom and their families. I also want to see a Scottish Parliament that provides the facilities so that people can combine a political role with their responsibility to their families and to the community as a whole. I want to see a parliamentary building that is accessible to disabled people. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland that the Royal high school in Edinburgh does not meet that need.

Given the lobbying that is under way for the site of a Scottish Parliament, I should like to take this opportunity to remind hon. Members that Dunfermline was the ancient capital of Scotland for several centuries, and that we have a rather empty former naval base, thanks to the actions of the previous Government, which would give people an opportunity, literally, to sail to and from work every morning if their Parliament were located there.

I certainly want to see a Parliament that breaks the hierarchical and patronising mould of what all too often goes on in this place—it is a Parliament that still tends to say that people, if elected, should put themselves on some kind of pedestal and act at best as some kind of benefactor.

I quote Richard Tawney, an English economic historian, who sums up clearly the reasons why I want to see constitutional change:

> "In the transition to political democracy, this country . . . underwent . . . no inner conversion. She accepted it as a convenience, like an improved system of telephones . . . She changed her political garments, but not her heart. She carried into

the democratic era, not only the institutions, but the social habits and mentality of the oldest and toughest plutocracy in the world . . . She went to the ballot-box touching her hat."

It is because I want to change that system of government, that style of politics, that I so fervently support the White Paper and the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. I urge people throughout Scotland to vote yes, yes on 11 September.

6.10 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) on her quotation from R. H. Tawney. It is refreshing to know that Tawney has not been totally exorcised from new Labour thinking. Perhaps she will pass the relevant quotation and the egalitarian concepts that lie behind it to the Prime Minister and the Minister without Portfolio, to re-educate them in the views of progressive politics.

I want first to address a remark or two to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I hope that he will agree that he and I have been opponents of long standing, but always in a dignified and courteous way. However, I think that he was quite wrong in the attack that he launched on the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), who referred to the battle of Stirling bridge. The hon. Lady was quoting from a Forth Valley Enterprise brochure, perhaps trying to advertise the activities of that agency in celebrating the battle of Stirling bridge. Such an historical reference can properly be made, even in the jocular fashion in which I think the hon. Lady was introducing it, without implying anti-English feeling.

I direct the hon. Gentleman to the diary of Robert Burns, who, writing about his early childhood, says that he drew his poetic inspiration and his view of humanity and of Scotland from Blind Harry's account of the stories of Wallace and Bruce, which includes an epic description of the battle of Stirling bridge. If a great humanitarian and nationalist and internationalist such as Robert Burns can draw such legitimate inspiration, the hon. Lady is perfectly entitled to make such a reference in introducing a speech in the House of Commons.

Mr. Grieve *rose—*

Mr. Salmond: I shall give way in a few minutes, but I want to develop a few points first.

The news of the evening so far must surely go not to the Secretary of State for Scotland, not even to the hon. Member for Linlithgow or to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute, but surely to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). He has moved his place, but he is still around. He said to fairly startled hon. Members, even on his own Benches—I could see their faces—that the poll tax was coming back in amended form.

I have heard a number of protagonists of a Scottish Parliament make arguments this evening, but nothing like as strong as the argument that was inadvertently advanced by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst. If the only thing that a Scottish Parliament on these White Paper proposals was to do was to save us from the amended poll tax, one day to be introduced by the right hon. Gentleman, that in itself would be game, set and match to the Scottish Parliament—a hostage to fortune that makes the tartan tax, and any slips that occur during the referendum campaign, pale into insignificance.

I assure the right hon. Gentleman that, although he will not be able to vote in the referendum, his words tonight will echo through the referendum campaign until 11 September, and no one in Scotland, least of all his relatives in Glasgow, will be under any illusions that, if he ever obtains a position of responsibility over Scotland, he will try to reintroduce the poll tax in some sort of amended form.

Mr. Forth *indicated assent.*

Mr. Salmond: I see the right hon. Gentleman nodding his assent. We have the final confirmation from the Conservative party. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman has been deserted by his colleagues, but he has been in a minority before. Presumably for the sake of advancement, he sought his career down south. No doubt he will find that there are pastures in the Conservative party which support his particular thoughts and development of opinion. I have great faith in the right hon. Gentleman's resilience, and great faith that the people of Scotland will bear his words in mind when they come to vote on 11 September.

Most of the debate has been pretty much an end-of-term affair. It has not been worthy of the subject that we are discussing. Madam Speaker said yesterday that it was bucket-and-spade time for many hon. Members. Although Conservative Members had some fun with the absence of many members of the new Labour party from Scottish constituencies, their own contribution tonight has also been half-hearted. Perhaps there is a recognition, as there should be, that the real debate will take place not in the House but in Scotland during the next six weeks. I doubt the wisdom of the two questions in the referendum, but Scotland is properly where the debate should take place.

I have long held the theory that, if I could bring everyone in Scotland down for the day and sit them in the Gallery of the House of Commons, I could turn everyone in the country into an ardent proponent of at least self-government for Scotland, and probably of independence. Some of the attitudes that are struck in this place, particularly by Conservative Members, in their nature appear to observers to be resentful of the Scottish interest.

I referred yesterday—I looked up the opinion poll evidence for it—to the fact that the vast majority of the people in Scotland now regard the Conservatives as an anti-Scottish party. I refer to the ICM poll for *The Scotsman* in February this year, which asked that specific question. I know that it is difficult for hon. Members, but they should read some of our debates and consider whether that impression is reinforced by many of the contributions and the asides that are regularly made in this place, especially at Scottish questions, for example.

However, nothing that I have heard in the Chamber quite compares with the debate that took place last night in the House of Lords, or perhaps for the purposes of this debate I shall call it the House of Chiels. There was an extraordinary debate in the House of Lords last night, although, in respect of what the Secretary of State said, I have to say that there were some jewels to be found within the sands of ignorance. Basically, however, it was a debate of profound ignorance of the Scottish situation. Having read the report of that debate in *Hansard* this morning, I cannot think of a worse place in which to have a debate about the future of Scotland than among the descendants—to quote Burns—of the "parcel of rogues" who sold the nation in 1707, or, for that matter, the newly ennobled representatives, many of whom have reached that tenure by coorieing up to the establishment throughout their career.

I want to offer the House a flavour of the debate that took place. The noble Lord Renton—I apologise to him in advance, because I could have picked many other examples—began by saying that he felt that the triple system in Scotland of district, regional and Westminster government was ideal, and no one should argue for any changes. He said that completely oblivious of the fact that the previous Government abolished the regional councils two years ago. That was pointed out to the noble Lord Renton, but I was struck by the fact that he did not withdraw his original argument. With a seamless ability, he merely took on board the fact that he had missed that abolition in his many visits to Scotland, and reintroduced the same argument, saying that basically he supported two layers of government, the unitary local authorities and Westminster, which were the most perfect that ever could be devised for mankind.

If we have reached the situation where the future of Scotland is being debated in these legislative Chambers by people who do not even know the present structure of government, we have cause to reflect on whether this is the perfect way to govern Scotland and whether it might not be rather better governed if the people who were arguing, debating and legislating at least knew what they were legislating about.

I wish to refer to the ennobled contributions. This may come as a surprise to Liberal Democrat Members, but I wish to comment on someone who knows a great deal about Scotland, the noble Lord Steel. He came up with the statement that there was "no public support" for the concept of independence. I have looked at the polls for the past five years, and the average support for Scottish independence is 33 per cent. I have looked also at the average support in Scotland for the Liberal Democrats over the same period, and it is 10 per cent.

I find it incredible that the former leader of the Liberal party—I know that he is now a noble Lord, but he is not senile and he is perfectly capable of constructing an argument—can argue that a concept has "no public support", when that concept has three times more support than the political party that he still represents. Not only should we not legislate in ignorance, but we should not have a Parliament where Members are able to divulge misinformation to other Members of that legislature, who apparently accepted the point without correction.

Lord Steel said that it was wrong for the Scottish National party to try to advance its case through a Scottish Assembly, yet his party wishes to advance its case for federalism through a Scottish Assembly. It is extraordinary that the noble Lord could argue that it is okay to try to extend the Parliament's powers towards federation, but it is somehow illicit and illegitimate to extend the Parliament's powers towards independence.

Mr. Swayne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salmond: I shall give way—I choose my words carefully—to my old university friend.

Mr. Swayne: Could my old university friend answer two points for me? First, will he confirm that it will be his intention from the outset to extend the powers of the Parliament? Secondly, will he become for a moment the devil's advocate—or the angel's advocate, depending on one's point of view—and state whether it would be more difficult for him to extend those powers were the Scottish people to have before them a defined Act, setting out exactly the powers and the nature of the Parliament, so that they could give a constitutional seal of approval? I suggest that it would be more difficult for those powers to be extended, at least for the first decade.

Mr. Salmond: It is a long time since the hon. Gentleman and I were at university together, but his interventions have not got any shorter in the intervening period. I was not sure whether I was to be described as the devil's advocate or the devil incarnate, which is how he used to describe me at university. It is obvious that the Scottish National party and those who believe in independence will stand for election looking for such a mandate for independence from the Scottish people. That, incidentally, is what we do when we stand for election to the Westminster Parliament.

According to a BBC Network poll two weeks ago, 71 per cent. of Scots believe that a Scottish Parliament would be a step towards an independent Scotland. We should agree that the judge and jury on whether Scotland becomes an independent state are the Scottish people as a whole. There is no backstairs secret way to Scottish independence. My party has advanced that cause for many years, and we have always done so by looking for a democratic mandate. Not every national or independence movement does that. I see the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman) in his place, and he generously has made that point on a number of occasions. We look for a democratic mandate every time we stand for election.

Dr. Fox: Does the hon. Gentleman consider the proposed Scottish Parliament to be a useful vehicle on the road to an independent Scotland?

Mr. Salmond: I shall certainly campaign for a mandate for Scottish independence on any democratic platform, including this one, which provides that opportunity. There is now unity among the parties on the entitlement of the Scottish people to seek independence. The Secretary of State for Scotland has expressed that view well over the past few weeks and, in fairness, I should point out that that is not a new position for him. He has advanced it throughout his political career.

That was also the position of Lady Thatcher, as expressed in her memoirs, although I must confess that I never heard the former Prime Minister express that view in as clear a form at the Dispatch Box as she did in "The Downing Street Years". To be fair, another former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), also expressed that view at recent Conservative party conferences. I have never heard it clearly expressed by the present Prime Minister—

[Mr. Salmond]

although I am certain that the Secretary of State for Scotland carries the whole Government with him in the acknowledgement of a democratic entitlement. That is where the matter should rest. Whether Scotland becomes an independent state should be determined by the people of Scotland. All the second-guessing on what policy might lead to Scottish independence misses the point.

The fundamental question will be decided not by the mechanics of government, but by the reality of Scottish identity. What is changing the nature of the debate in Scotland is not the form of government that has been proposed, but the changing nature of Scotland itself. Since the war, Scotland has become a much more Scottish place and a much less British place, as reflected in many institutions and in polls. People's identity is in transition in Scotland. For many hon. Members, that is an uncomfortable thought, and I understand that. None the less, that is what is happening.

We have not had a Scottish Parliament during the past 20 years, but support for Scottish independence as a concept has doubled among the population in that time. If only a devolved Parliament could increase support for independence, why have we seen that change in the past 20 years? My theory is that it is about the politics of identity.

Mrs. Laing: I compliment the hon. Gentleman on the clarity and logic of his argument, as a contrast to the argument of the Government. Independence is a perfectly clear and logical route which could be chosen. Does he agree that it is usual that, when an agreement voluntarily entered into by two parties is to be changed, both parties should be part of the new agreement? Is it not the case that Scotland—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has got away with long interventions earlier because she is a new Member, but there comes a time when I have to say that she must be brief.

Mr. Salmond: The interventions are becoming almost as long as my speech, and the clarity that the hon. Lady acknowledged cannot be found in the interventions. She compliments me—beware Greeks bearing gifts and Tories proffering compliments is sensible advice.

The former Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands used to refer to the concept well, when he described the possible advent of Scottish independence as being like leaving a bowling club. *[Interruption.]* It is not my analogy—it is the former Foreign Secretary's analogy. He said that, if one wanted to change the rules of the bowling club, one went to the AGM—let us say that this House is the equivalent of an AGM—to propose a change in the rules. If one got a majority, the rules were changed. That was his analogy for devolution. If someone wanted to leave the bowling club—that was his analogy for independence—they should tear up their membership card. The decision would be for them, and for them alone. Independence means a decision for Scots, and for Scots alone. *[Interruption.]* The reaction from Conservative Members convinces me that Malcolm Rifkind did not always carry the whole Conservative party with him when he made such analogies.

The White Paper contains many weaknesses and inconsistencies. It is remarkable, for instance, that it should state that the Scottish Parliament is to be given "competence" over the police in Scotland, but not over estate agents. I am not sure what conclusions should logically be drawn from that. A Scottish Parliament will be given control over capital punishment, but not over abortion; it is to control the health service in Scotland, but not the legislation governing cinemas and theatres. It will not have real economic power, and, as has been made clear in the debate, it will not have access to the real decision making in Europe. It will not even have supervision over broadcasting in Scotland. Many regional Parliaments throughout Europe are able to have such powers.

Let me, however, make the case for some of the things that the Parliament will be able to do, according to the White Paper. In debates such as this, we often hear about the cost of a Scottish Parliament. The introduction of the poll tax in Scotland cost £1,000 million: that was the cost of the administration of its introduction, of transitional relief and, subsequently, of its scrapping. The Government estimate that the cost of running a Scottish Parliament will be £20 million a year. That means that we could run a Scottish Parliament for 50 years, and the cost would be the same as that of a single piece of maladministration and insensitive government that was foisted on the Scottish people against their will. The Bromley question—as we shall call it during the referendum campaign—suggests that it might come back. On the basis of the White Paper proposals, the Scottish Parliament would not make the same mistake.

The same could be said of a variety of measures. The white elephant of Health Care International, which was pursued by the previous Government, cost £20 million: that is what running a Scottish Parliament for a year would cost. Then there is the "learning tax" that the current Government propose. We are not just talking about not adopting a course that is not wanted in Scotland; we are talking about the time and energy that are currently spent resisting, campaigning against and trying to stop things from being foisted on Scotland. All that energy could be put to more creative use in an attempt to build a better Scotland. Even in regard to fairly restricted levels of competence, there is a positive democratic argument for a Scottish Parliament. Ultimately, democracy must mean better government than bureaucracy.

Let me give what could be described as a seminar about Conservative Members who constantly peddle the myth of the subsidised Scot. I rather hoped, in view of parliamentary answers given in the previous Parliament—especially those given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 January and 21 March—that that argument had finally been laid to rest. The parliamentary answers showed that there had been a surplus of revenue over expenditure in Scotland since 1979 of some £31,000 million—£6,000 for every man, woman and child.

The hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) shakes his head. Let me point out that, during the election campaign in Scotland, that was finally accepted not just by the Scottish National party but by representatives of the Labour party and, indeed, the former Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth. According to *The Herald* on 8 April:

> "Scottish Secretary Michael Forsyth accepted publicly for the first time that the figures extracted from Mr. William Waldegrave, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, did show a net flow of £27,000 billion."

In *The Scotsman* on 29 March, Jim Stevens, a member of the Scottish Labour party executive—no friend of the Scottish National party and, I think, no friend of some of the more ardent devolutionists in Labour's ranks—said:

> "I am saying that the SNP are right. The evidence produced from the Scottish Office and the Treasury suggests that they are right."

Let me say this to Conservative Members. Of course, because Scotland has a relatively small population in relation to its land mass, services are delivered at a higher cost per person. There is the roads budget, for instance, and the cost of joining up outlying communities. There is also the education budget. There are far more small primary schools in Scotland than there are per head of population south of the border.

The advantage to a country with a small population and a large land mass, however, is that natural resources per head are also much greater. I am thinking not only of oil and gas, but of land, fish, water and all the other natural resources from which Scotland benefits. To concentrate on the expenditure aspects without considering the resources and revenue arguments—which is what Conservative Members are doing—is to concentrate on only one side of the case.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The hon. Gentleman may be overlooking the fact that the level of public spending in Scotland is not currently based on needs. Does he accept that it should be needs-based, and does he accept that if it were—on an objective basis—there would be a cut in public expenditure of about £2.5 billion?

Mr. Salmond: Despite my best efforts during the 10 years that I have been in the House, the hon. Gentleman continues to misunderstand my position. I am for a Scottish Parliament that has total control over all revenue and spending in Scotland. I am in favour of Scotland sending no Members of Parliament to Westminster. I am in favour of putting our house in order, and allowing the hon. Gentleman—but, for the sake of the people of England, I hope that he does not prevail—to put his own house in order, along with other hon. Members representing English constituencies.

The hon. Gentleman has led himself into an illogicality. He should take two matters into account. First, the Barnett formula is an equalisation formula, not a formula that is preferential to Scotland. Secondly, that formula was devised, in the 1970s, in preparation for devolution. It is somewhat surprising to hear the hon. Gentleman argue that a formula that was devised for devolution in the 1970s should be undercut by devolution in the 1990s. *[Interruption.]*

The hon. Gentleman continues to intervene from a sedentary position, as he does during so many speeches. I suggest that, on principle, Scotland should have access to all our resources, and that we should be able to enjoy the substantial fiscal subsidies that Scotland has built up over the past few years, and could generate in the coming few years.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Salmond: I have given way generously to Conservative Members. Let me make two final points.

The European dimension to the debate is crucial. The White Paper went rather further than I suspected it would in opening up that dimension for the Scottish people; but, as the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) will acknowledge, many key decision affecting Scotland are made in Europe. Given that we are part of Europe, it is in our interests to have the maximum influence in Europe—which, of course, means being a member state. However, if a devolved Scottish Parliament could give us more access to decision making in Europe, that would be a great advantage.

I asked the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) how many Council of Ministers meetings Scottish Office Ministers had attended over the past few years, but he could not give me an answer. I have now obtained an answer, however, and can therefore inform the House that, of 542 Council of Ministers meetings that have taken place in the past five years, Scottish Office Ministers have attended 44. That is less than 10 per cent. My constituents would say that it is a good job that those Ministers were not on piece work: if they were, they would have been paid very little.

Despite Scotland's apparent claimed influence in Europe, its influence amounts to less than 10 per cent. in terms of vital decision making that affects it. If the White Paper enhances that to any extent at all—as it claims that it will—it is very welcome.

I said that I thought that this debate had a bucket-and-spade feel to it. The real debate on the issue will take place in Scotland over the next six weeks, and I shall enter that debate in a positive frame of mind. I shall speak about the future of Scotland and try to look as constructively as possible at how the proposals will benefit the Scottish people—at what is in Scotland's best interests. I do not regard any political debate as a foregone conclusion, but whatever the outcome, I am certain that the quality of the debate about the future of our nation will be better over the next six weeks at home than it has ever been in this place.

6.39 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I congratulate the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on at least returning the debate to a serious mode. I have always disagreed with his advocacy of Scottish nationalism, but he is at least making a serious case. He and I and many of my hon. Friends will agree that we find it deeply offensive for Scottish business to be discussed in this place as if it were fun and games or the subject of a fourth-form debate. The view is that it is not to be taken seriously, that it is only about mad Scots, kilted people from up north somewhere.

That attitude is deeply offensive to Scottish people and it is one of the major reasons for the Tories being wiped out in the general election. The televising of Parliament showed that attitude being taken night after night, and some Conservative Members were especially guilty. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire), who spoke about a different way of conducting Scottish business in our own Scottish Parliament.

Some hon. Members have queried why no one is consulting England on this issue. The matter was raised in a fourth-form way, but it is a serious point and I shall address it. It may be news to some Tory Members that the campaign for a Scottish Parliament did not begin with a White Paper or among hon. Members: it began with the people of Scotland.

For more than eight years, those of us in the Scottish Constitutional Convention made plans for organising the Parliament, having elections to it and deciding what

[Mrs. Maria Fyfe]

it would run. Over those eight years, Scottish organisations and political parties discussed those issues. The media were aware of that, and if the people of England had wanted to review and revise how they were governed and how their home affairs were to be conducted, they could have engaged in such an exercise at any time. They could still do that: nobody is stopping them.

I do not want to tell English people how to conduct their home affairs: that is for them to say, and I am prepared to listen to their proposals with good will. However, Opposition remarks about the tail wagging the dog are utterly unacceptable and grossly offensive. Some people seem to have forgotten that in 1707 there was a union of Parliaments, although it was brought about by a parcel of rogues for ill motives. It was not a case of a small group of people "up there" making a nuisance of themselves. Such attitudes have destroyed the Tories in Scotland, and long may that continue.

Some women Members have said that in a Scottish Parliament at least three parties—Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish Nationalists—will be committed to equality of representation of the sexes. I had assumed that some Scottish Conservatives would be elected and thought that we would fall short of our ambition for a 50:50 representation. However, given the way that Conservatives are going on, they will have no Members in that Parliament and there will be 50:50 representation.

Mr. Grieve: I think that the hon. Lady misunderstands the comment about the tail wagging the dog. It was not a reference to the Union, whose ideals and existence we support. I understood the reference to be to the fact that, in the discussion of the devolution process, changes are being suggested for Scotland that will have a knock-on effect on the English. That issue is not being addressed and, to that extent, the tail is wagging the dog. The comment has nothing to do with the Union. There were unequal populations, but the Union came about and developed from a meeting of minds and a willingness to co-operate.

Mrs. Fyfe: As I have said, no one is stopping the people of England discussing whether they want to change the way in which their home affairs are conducted. They are still free to do that. The previous Prime Minister tried to scare English people into voting Tory at the election. He made fear of breaking up the United Kingdom the biggest issue, and he told them to vote Tory to preserve the Union. What did they do? They voted against the Tories in their millions. That showed that the people of England are not convinced or swayed by attempts to frighten them. Those of us who believe in devolution want the best for our friends and colleagues in England, but it is up to them to say what they want. It is not for us to tell them or for anyone to tell us how to run our home affairs.

For many years while the battle was going on, Labour Members and Labour activists were continually asked, "Will Labour really deliver? You failed 20 years ago and imposed a 40 per cent. rule. Can we trust you?" No one says that now, because Labour is delivering, and all that will stop us getting the Parliament is failure by people to vote yes in the referendum. We were also asked whether we would water it down, but it is obvious to one and all that, far from a watering down, the Government have improved the proposals that were delivered by the convention.

One reason for a possible poor turnout could be a lack of publicity about postal and proxy votes. During the general election campaign, I met many people who wanted to vote but had left it too late. There must be more publicity about the referendum and, of course, about other elections. I am sure that that will have a bearing on the turnout.

Mr. Salmond: I was shocked to find in my constituency during the election that some polling stations were not provided with proper access for disabled people, despite representations by me and other hon. Members over some years. Perhaps the hon. Lady has had a similar experience and if she has, this might be a good point at which to put it on the record.

Mrs. Fyfe: The hon. Gentleman anticipates my next point. In my constituency, disabled people were being turned away at one polling station until access was made available. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman supports my view on that.

It is important for the Parliament to be genuinely representative of all our people. When women Labour Members raised the issue of equal representation for women, Opposition Members sniggered. I hope that they will say why they found that funny. They have not yet offered any thoughts on equal representation, but perhaps they will. The Parliament can provide equal opportunities through legislation, and will be entitled to do that.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): The hon. Lady decries what we said on this matter. Has she not considered that people should be elected to this place and to other democratic assemblies on merit and not because they belong to a specific class, sex or party?

Mrs. Fyfe: Sometimes I think that I am psychic. I knew that the hon. Gentleman would say that. What is wrong with Scottish Tory women? Few have been elected. Are they inadequate? The hon. Gentleman speaks about merit. On 1 May, the Scottish people certainly offered an opinion on who had merit and who did not.

Mr. Swinney: Does the hon. Lady agree that some Conservative women in Scotland may be appalled at the prospect of representing what currently constitutes the Conservative party in Scotland?

Mrs. Fyfe: I am sure that that goes for the majority of Scots women. Some women in Scotland support the Tory party, but it gives them little support. Not many of them are chosen as candidates because the Tory party is very much a male club.

One important thing that this Parliament can do is to have a system that genuinely listens to people and is open to them. It is appalling that this Parliament found time for children's legislation affecting Scotland only once in 25 years, but, when it did so, various bodies in Scotland gave evidence, which was a valuable part of the process and which the Scottish Parliament will follow through on.

I must watch the time; I have been giving way too generously. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)—and he is a friend—said earlier that the Scottish Parliament would not last 10 years, but he blithely went on without giving a shred of evidence for that remark. It will last for as long as the Scottish people want it to. It could last for a long time, but it all depends on what they want.

Mr. Dalyell: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Fyfe: I am sorry. I cannot because of the time.

The Scottish Parliament has been a long time coming. I look forward to getting that Parliament. I am sure that it could not introduce any measure worse than the poll tax. In recent days, we have talked about the cost of the poll tax. Let us never forget the human misery that it caused. People in our surgeries were in tears, afraid of not being able to pay that debt and wondering what would happen to their worldly goods. Nothing could have been worse than that. I cannot believe that those people in Scotland who are elected by Scottish people to conduct their home affairs, will ever perpetrate anything remotely like that. I look forward to achieving a Scottish Parliament in due course.

6.51 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): It is a matter of some pride to me that, three hours into this debate, I am the first Englishman representing an English constituency to be called to speak, and I have a right to speak. Hon. Members might expect me to launch into a tirade against Scottish devolution. I intend to do no such thing. In my few comments, I am not going to start lecturing people in Scotland about what the nature of their government should be. I will analyse simply what the legislation will mean for my English constituents. When England wakes up to what is proposed, there will be considerable debate about these issues.

For the sake of argument, I will assume that the referendum is passed and that devolution happens—I do not think that that is such an absurd assumption—and I will be entirely agnostic about the merits or demerits of devolution as it affects Scotland. Last week, after the statement by the Secretary of State for Scotland, I again had the honour of being the first Englishman to be called—on that occasion, after 34 minutes. I put this question to him: why should he vote on the future of a grammar school in Caistor or in Gainsborough in my constituency, when neither he nor I would have the right to vote on education in his constituency?

Of course, the Secretary of State had no answer to that. His response was a variation of the argument that might is right. It seemed to be that Parliament is sovereign, can do what it chooses and has decided to do this. That is fair enough. I accept that at face value. The Scottish Parliament is going to happen. We knew that it was going to happen. We cannot stop the Labour party using its majority to achieve those ends. Of course, Parliament can decide to act unfairly or treat people in one part of the UK differently from those in another part of the UK, but, when it does act unfairly, this Parliament usually decides, in the course of time, to put things right. Devolution is going to happen, but I predict that this anomaly will be put right.

As an Englishman, I, too, have a claim of right. I and my constituents have a right to be treated fairly. I proclaim this principle: no representative should make a decision on behalf of people in other parts of the nation unless those people have a right to run affairs in that representative's part of the nation. That is an elementary democratic right. It is the principle of reciprocity, and we in England have a right to proclaim it. I say to the Scottish people: as the years go by, we will proclaim it with increasing force.

The first union that this country was involved in was with the United States, and it broke up more than 200 years ago on the cry, "No taxation without representation," so England shall awake—*[Interruption.]* There is no point in Scottish representatives laughing. Just as, in recent years, the European debate has dominated our affairs, so the devolution debate will increasingly dominate them.

The Government's answer is, "We accept this. This is the old West Lothian question. We have had all this before. It has been discussed for 18 years. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has bored us rigid about it, but no system is perfect. There will always be some imbalance." But, sometimes, something can be so unbalanced that the scales do not just tilt or sway, but come crashing to the ground. I suspect that that will happen within five, 10, or 15 years in this Parliament.

The answer from the Liberal Democrats is the obvious one: "We accept all this; the answer is the federal solution," but I suggest to my Liberal friends that, if a federal solution is to work, there has to be some similarity in size between the different regions, and a tradition—as in Germany and Italy, which were not nations before 1870—throughout the nation of devolved government. That is not the case in the UK.

South-east England has a population and an economy infinitely greater than that of Scotland. There is no separate sense of nationhood in south-east England. People who live in Sussex do not feel that they are different in any particular way from people who live in Leicestershire, although that would be in the east midlands region, while Sussex would be in the south-east region. In Lincolnshire, we have no right or desire to be run, as would happen, by the Leicester Labour party. We want to run our own affairs through our county and district councils, and we want our national affairs to be run here in London, not in Leicester.

Therefore, the Liberal solution, the so-called federal solution, is bogus. It will not happen. There is no call or desire for it in the English regions. In any event, we would be offered in Leicester, Plymouth or wherever not a Parliament, but only an assembly, a souped-up county council.

What will happen? The only solution—and I do not suggest this as a desired state of affairs, but as something that will happen—is that the Speaker will mark every Bill that relates to matters such as health and education that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, and Scottish Members will be prevented from voting on that Bill. That will be a significant step forward or perhaps, in some people's view, a step back.

Scottish Members will still be able to vote on a considerable range of matters. As we know from the White Paper, they will vote on defence and constitutional matters that are reserved to the UK Parliament. In a spirit

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

of compromise, I have no doubt that they will also vote on matters relating to finance. After all, the size of the block grant influences many decisions relating to education and health, but Scottish Members will be prevented from voting on operational matters.

What are operational matters? The obvious example is the one that I put to the Secretary of State, which was whether we should preserve the remaining 164 grammar schools in England. As long as the people of Scotland are aware that, ultimately, their Members of Parliament will be prevented from voting on such matters—I suspect that that will be the case—they can go ahead and vote for devolution. They may say that they do not want a vote on such matters as they have no interest in English education.

It has been said that that is unlikely to happen and that there are huge constitutional objections to the Speaker marking Bills. What would happen if Labour Members outnumbered Tory Members in the United Kingdom Parliament as a whole, but, as in both the 1974 elections, they did not outnumber the Conservative Members in England alone? That would be a major objection, but the Government would have to carry on. The Government would have to be based on the total number of Members of Parliament, because those Members will decide what happens in the really important issues such as the Budget, the constitution, defence and foreign affairs.

I have already given a warning to the people of Scotland about their declining influence, but the Labour party should look to the future, too, and realise that it will not always have this enormous majority. There will, one day, be another Conservative Government and there will be pressure to introduce changes. The Labour party will find that its ability to influence matters such as health and education in England will be severely restricted.

There may be difficult or even absurd situations. For example, a Scottish Minister in the Cabinet would be able to decide the fate of grammar schools in England because the Cabinet is an informal structure. However, in the Division at 10 o'clock, he would not be allowed to vote. However, as the Government have said, nothing is perfect and, as they have rejected the apparently neat device of a federal solution, this will have to do.

What is the history of all this? Is this just the hon. Member for Gainsborough coming out with a few ideas that have not been talked about in the past? Of course not. I have done some research. I have been talking about what is known as the in-out solution. The idea was first suggested to Gladstone by Lord Rosebery at the time of the Irish home rule legislation. There were two arguments against the in-out solution. Gladstone told Rosebery that it put too much power in the hands of the Speaker. He said:

> "I am afraid that the Speakership would hardly bear weight of your proposal."

I do not believe that Gladstone was right. You have broad shoulders, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I believe that you could bear the weight. It would be easy for you to determine the issues that relate purely to Scottish operational matters. You would then mark them and Scottish Members would not be allowed to vote on them.

The second objection was raised 100 years ago, again on Irish home rule legislation, when it was suggested that such a procedure would be constitutionally impossible. As I have said, the parties could have different parliamentary majorities in Scotland, Wales and England and it could bifurcate the Executive.

We could overcome these difficulties. There would be a considerable problem because, together, Scotland and Wales have 112 Members of Parliament. Let us make no mistake; this is no small issue or small constitutional point that need not worry the people of these islands.

In 1969, the Kilbrandon commission dealt with all the objections to the in-out solution, but said that it was the most logical answer. The hon. Member for Linlithgow will know that section 66 of the Scotland Act 1978 said that where a Bill in the House of Commons which does not relate to or concern Scotland receives a majority on Second Reading only by virtue of the votes of Scottish MPs, a second vote will take place at least 14 days later, and only if a majority is achieved on that second vote will the Bill be deemed to have been read a Second time. That section was eventually passed by one vote.

There is nothing new in this. It is going to happen and it has been talked about in the past. It is a real threat, if it is thought of in those terms, to the influence of Scottish Members of Parliament.

There is another threat of which Scottish Members must be aware and, as an Englishman, I am entitled to mention it. There will be a further reduction in the number of Scottish Members. During the debate on Irish home rule, the question of Irish representation was bitterly disputed on the Floor of the House. Gladstone's first home rule Bill of 1886—this will delight our friends in the Scottish National party—entirely removed Irish representation from this House. His subsequent Bill of 1893 gave the Irish a reduced number of Members—they had 107 and it was reduced to 80. Originally, the 1886 Bill contained an in-out restriction such as I have described, but it was dropped in Committee. In 1914, the legislation for the Government of Ireland proposed 42 Irish Members, with no in-out restrictions.

All the debates that we are likely to have were aired 80 or 90 years ago. We all know that, when the Northern Irish Government was set up, the number of Members was reduced. There were originally 13 Members but it was reduced to 12 in 1947 with the loss of the university seats. In 1918, in the pre-Stormont Parliament, Ulster had 30 Members. At one time, the number of Northern Ireland Members was 13, but it was increased to 17.

We all know that Scotland has always been over-represented at Westminster. Since the war, Scotland has had more than 11 per cent. of the total seats, but in 1994, it had only 9 per cent. of the United Kingdom electorate. Fair enough: we have all accepted that compromise. However, if the 1920s Northern Ireland formula were adopted—two thirds of its proportionate share—the number of seats for Scotland would be reduced to 40. That might have to be 45, as that was the number of seats given to Scotland in the Act of Union 1707.

I am not making those points to our Scottish friends in order to be difficult. I do not want to drive them out. I am just saying that these issues have been discussed for over a century and they will be discussed more and more.

Mr. Salmond: I am not sure that this is the best example for the hon. Gentleman to use. In world history, there are many examples of devolved Parliaments becoming independent Parliaments, but Ireland is not one of them. Surely, Ireland is an example of devolution not leading to independence.

Mr. Leigh: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I must say that that is a bad point. Stormont was created by people whose entire raison d'etre was to stay in the United Kingdom. Is that the ambition of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) who represents the SNP? His ambition is precisely the opposite. My right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) knows that perfectly well.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman had plenty of time to make his points. He knows what his game plan is and he has no doubts about it. He is perfectly honourable about the fact that he intends to remove himself and all Scottish Members from this Parliament. That is the doomsday scenario, which may or may not happen.

I can tell Scottish Labour Members that there will be increasing pressure to reduce their number to below 58 and to insist on the in-out proposals that I have mentioned. The influence of Scotland in the United Kingdom Parliament will gradually and inevitably decline. Do Labour Members and the people of Scotland want that?

7.8 pm

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I was interested in the reference by the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) to Gladstone's Bill. I should have thought that it is not the number of Scottish Members, but the principle of representation in this place, that is a matter of contention. The hon. Gentleman was right to say that, over the next few years, that issue will be debated over and over again.

I want to respond to three comments—one by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), one by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)—who is not in his place at the moment—and one by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram).

I agree with what the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said about the criterion of residence for the referendum. Two members of my family have chosen to live in Australia. One is now an Australian citizen; the other hopes to become one. I suspect that, had they voted in the last election, they would have voted for the Scottish National party—but I am not responsible for youngsters. They told me that they had chosen to live in another country and hence had no moral right to take part in the referendum. Therefore, I agree on that point with the right hon. Gentleman, although I thought that his remarks on the poll tax were utterly absurd.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow referred to the unintended consequences of this measure. I remind him that, at a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Dumfries last July, I said:

> "I believe that within the next 20 years, Scotland will either be a constituent nation within a federal Britain, or an independent member state of the European Union. I think that we will proceed unevenly down the federalist road."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 5 July 1996; c.30.]

My hon. Friend was right to say what he did.

The right hon. Member for Devizes might have been a little needled by my earlier comment on his contradictory view on political devolution. He told me to take care and speak to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about a Northern Ireland elected Assembly based on proportional representation. I actually did that on 30 June. In response, I received a letter from my hon. Friend the Minister of State—it is germane to this debate—saying:

> "As you well know we endorsed in Opposition the proposals published by the previous Government for new democratic institutions in Northern Ireland outlined in the 'Framework for Accountable Government' document of February 1995. Those proposals were based extensively on discussions in 1991/92 with the four main political parties in Northern Ireland. In essence the proposals include the establishment of the unicameral Assembly which would have legislative and executive responsibilities; with a system of Assembly Committees, constituted broadly in proportion to party strengths in the Assembly and detailed checks and balances intended to sustain confidence in the new institutions. Elections to the Assembly would be by a form of proportional representation."

That is precisely what the White Paper suggests. I believe that the right hon. Gentleman was sympathetic to that proposal, if not a signatory to it.

My hon. Friend the Minister continued:

> "It will be for the talks participants, however, to decide how far they take into account these proposals. Any new arrangements settled on must command support from representatives of both communities in Northern Ireland—as the talks voting rules require—and then be approved in a referendum before being submitted to Parliament."

There are vast differences between Northern Ireland and Scotland, as we all know. The right hon. Member for Devizes was party to a proposal for an elected Assembly based on proportional representation—but, before it was set up, the people would have to decide through a referendum.

In advance of the debate, I picked up a book entitled "England's case against home rule", written by a professor of English law at Oxford university. In his concluding remarks, he said:

> "On the whole, then, it appears that whatever changes or calamities the future may have in store"—

I suspect that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow will support these sentiments—

> "the maintenance of the union is at this stage the one sound policy for England to pursue. It is sad because it is expedient, it is sound because it is just. Still, at this great crisis in the fortunes of our country, when every course is involved in undeniable perplexity and surrounded by admitted danger, there are two principles to which we may confidently appeal"—

this is an English case against home rule—

> "it is by habitual adherence to them that England has grown to greatness. These two principles are the maintenance of the supremacy of the whole state and the use of that supremacy for the purpose of securing to every citizen, whether rich or poor, the rights of liberty and of property conferred upon him by law."

That was published in November 1886, a few months after the defeat of Gladstone's first home rule Bill. That is why I was pleased that the hon. Member for Gainsborough referred to that Bill.

I want to quote more recently from an Irish author who is employed at Edinburgh university. In the current edition of "Scottish Affairs", Owen Dudley Edwards says:

> "Tory devolutionists were once an impressive throng, with such prominent names as Alec Douglas-Home, Edward Heath, William Whitelaw, Margaret Thatcher, Alick Buchanan-Smith, Malcolm Rifkind, Michael Forsyth: of these Buchanan-Smith alone remained true to his faith. But today's Tory Devolvers are Edinburgh

ex-Councillor Christine Richard and Councillor Brian Meek, Struan Stevenson (the vanquished heir to Sir Hector Munro's once safe seat in Dumfries) and other minor lights."

Brian Meek said in his recent column in *The Herald*:

> "One of my biggest political mistakes, and not the only one, in the past decade was to turn my back on participating in the Scottish Constitutional Convention. Devo-Tories like me ought to have been there. You can't have any influence from outside.
>
> We should have been arguing for a better system of financing for the parliament . . . Yet I do long for a parliament in Edinburgh and believe the people of Scotland will vote overwhelmingly in favour of the principle. When it happens nothing will ever be quite the same again."

He is absolutely right in his prediction. He continued:

> "I hear a whisper that my good friend, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, is thinking of standing".

Lord James would make an excellent Conservative representative.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Godman: Sit down.

The Parliament will be based upon proportional representation and there will be a number of Scots in that Parliament.

I want to refer to that most fair-minded and courteous of adversarialists, the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack). I shall have a bet with him here and now that that fine son of his, Charlie Cormack, will stand for the Scottish Parliament. He, too, was a fair-minded and courteous adverserialist in the recent general election. I met him and I believe that he would grace the Conservative Benches of a Scottish Parliament.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his generous words. However, I want to put on the record the fact that my son, of whom I am very proud—I am delighted by what the hon. Gentleman said about him—will certainly campaign for no, no in the referendum. I shall help him so to do. However, he is a democrat and if the vote goes in favour of a Scottish Parliament, of course he may stand. If he does, it will be with my blessing. However, he would do so not because he wants a Scottish Parliament, but in the hope that, from within, he might help to prevent the worst things from happening. He believes, as I believe, that the very integrity of the United Kingdom is threatened by these ill-thought-out proposals.

Mr. Godman: That was a most graceful intervention. All I would say to Charlie Cormack is not to come back to Renfrewshire. He would be better off standing in Perthshire, even with proportional representation. However, I take on board what the hon. Gentleman says. I am simply saying that I would place a bet—

Mr. Salmond: It was a graceful intervention by the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), but did the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman) note the inconsistency? Earlier, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) said that it was inevitable that a devolved Parliament would end up as an independent Parliament. Now his colleague has said that his son will be dispatched to try to prevent that from happening. They cannot both be right. Which one is?

Mr. Godman: With due respect to the right hon. Member for Devizes, I plump for the interpretation of the hon. Member for South Staffordshire. I look forward to the hon. Member for South Staffordshire canvassing for a no, no vote, and I hope that he will come to Greenock and Inverclyde. I should say also that I do not represent Port Glasgow.

Let us not deny that creation of a Scottish Parliament will undoubtedly lead to restructuring of the United Kingdom. Let us remember that the previous Conservative Government, who made some admirable proposals for Northern Ireland, began restructuring the United Kingdom. We could not have established a Northern Ireland Assembly with legislative and executive powers and expected that there would be no change in other parts of the United Kingdom. There will be changes.

The Scottish National party's agenda is not hidden, and we know that its members want an independent Scotland. I admire them because they have always been peaceable and democratic secessionists—unlike some of those whom we know, to our cost, in Northern Ireland. I admire the principle in which they believe, although I do not agree with it, because I am a federalist, and I have been one throughout my adult life. Nevertheless, they maintain an honourable position—although, of course, I always hope for their defeat.

In a recent editorial, *The Guardian* wrote:

> "A more important question is whether creation of a Scottish Parliament will maintain the Union—just as Catalonia has remained part of Spain and Bavaria part of Germany—or whether it will lead to full independence. It is a 50-50 shout. Under the security of the European Union umbrella, independence is a feasible option. Labour's response is a grown-up one: if the Scots eventually opt for independence then so be it"—

as many hon. Members have said in this debate.

In *The Observer*, Will Hutton wrote:

> "The Bill published last week on Scottish devolution (and to a lesser extent that on Wales) captures this demand"

for change

> "and in so doing represents an incalculable change to the way Britain will be governed. For what will emerge from devolution is a dynamic that will create a federal Britain."

I believe that, in the next 20 to 25 years, there will be such a dynamic.

As I said in yesterday's debate—after an Opposition Member asked about the possibility of an English Parliament—let us establish an English Parliament over time, once there is a genuine and legitimate demand for such an institution. Federal societies work well elsewhere, and a federal Britain could work extremely well. There will always be contradictions and stresses, but we shall have to live with those problems.

I should like to ask my hon. Friend the Minister a few questions—although I asked him one yesterday, and he said that I was not being very helpful. For many years, I have argued that there should be an international architectural competition for a new Scottish Parliament—although I would love for us to return to Parliament house. If there is an international architectural competition, however, I am not sure that the winning design should be chosen by people watching STV, BBC or Grampian, because it should be chosen by a panel of people who are representative of the nation. If I had been on the panel that chose the design for the national museum of Scotland, I would have chosen the runner-up rather than the winning design. A panel will have to choose the design in any international competition.

Yesterday, I asked my hon. Friend the Minister whether there had been any assessment of the suitability of adapting Holyroodhouse palace as a Parliament. The right hon. Member for Devizes may smile at that question, but, in the past few years, that wonderful building has been used on average for only 29 days per year, although each year it costs the Scottish Office more than £1 million to maintain. Although meetings were held there during our presidency of the European Union, it may be utterly unsuitable for use as a Parliament. Nevertheless, using it for only 34 days a year leaves much to be desired.

Sir Robert Smith: The hon. Gentleman may not have heard a sedentary comment of, "Who cares?" Do not such comments demonstrate the need for a Scottish Parliament? The Scottish people care about debates on events in Scotland, even if some hon. Members representing English constituencies do not.

Mr. Godman: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am utterly and genuinely convinced that, on 1 May 1997, had that currently English regional party won the general election, many more of my constituents would be opting for independence. I think that the Labour party, in winning the election, was given a last chance in Scotland. We shall deliver our promise and establish a Scottish Parliament, based—I am delighted to say—on the list rather than the single transferable vote system. The Irish Republic and other places show that the latter is wholly unacceptable.

When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland presented his White Paper, I suggested that, in the medium term, it may make sense to create a constitutional court to resolve conflicts between Edinburgh and London. It could be composed of four senior judges, one each from Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. Answering my question, my right hon. Friend said that the best recourse would be to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in cases in which

> "practical solutions to any dispute resolution . . . are required, ending with arbitration".—[*Official Report*, 24 July 1997; Vol. 298, c. 1051.]

Such a solution might be legitimate and fair on a short-term basis, but for the medium term we should be considering a constitutional court.

As I have said often, we live in a multinational state. If one of the constituent nations of that multinational state attempts to transform that nation's governance, no person or party in another part of the multinational state has a legitimate right to obstruct the reform or to hinder the advance. We are witnessing such obstruction and hindrance by Conservative Members. They will lose the debate in the United Kingdom, as they have already lost it in Scotland. We shall have a Parliament.

7.27 pm

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): I have listened to the entire debate and can best describe my reaction to it as one of sadness. I belong to a nation that has barely been mentioned by any hon. Member in the debate, because I am not English, Scots, Welsh or Irish—I am British, and very proud of it. We have not heard much about that aspect of the debate.

We should remember that this is the British Parliament. We already have a Scottish Parliament, and this is it. There is already an English Parliament, and this is it. We already have a Northern Irish Parliament and a Welsh Parliament, and it meets here. We cast aside, doubt and jeopardise that fact at our peril.

In the devolution debate, the Scottish nationalists have been absolutely open, honest and true to their beliefs. It is also no accident that the Scottish National party supports the Government's proposals for Scottish devolution.

This afternoon, I have with regret heard some of my English colleagues speak from a purely English perspective. I do not like it; it is against my temperament, because being British is what defines me and my nation. However, the views expressed this afternoon undoubtedly, but sadly, represent a rising tide of opinion in the English constituencies. If I can send any message to the Government that has any chance of being listened to, it is that they should not, for God's sake, underestimate the potential of the proposals in the White Paper to provoke the kind of reaction that we have heard today.

Mr. Gray: The English worm will turn.

Mr. Day: We must avoid that at all costs.

I shall do all in my limited power to defend the Union that I love and hold dear. Nothing that is said from the Scottish perspective to antagonise the English, and nothing said from the English perspective to antagonise the Scots, holds any sway with me. They are small arguments that matter not to me. People who adopt a nationalist position and threaten the United Kingdom, and those who propose changes to our constitution such as those found in the White Paper, are people with little minds, creating little plans which will ultimately lead to little countries with no influence in the world. If this Parliament and the United Kingdom want to go down that path, I shall have to question whether this Parliament is still the Parliament that I knew and of which I wanted to be part.

Mr. Swinney: If this is such a British Parliament, why was the poll tax introduced in Scotland before it was introduced in England?

Mr. Day: Obviously, I was not a member of the Government at that time; I was a Back Bencher so I was not responsible for deciding when that legislation was introduced. However, the system that those with a nationalist perspective appear to want to bring tumbling down around their ears worked to the advantage of the Scots, the Welsh and everyone else in that it ultimately delivered them from the community charge, the poll tax or whatever one wishes to call it—the very thing about which people had been complaining. The system cannot be so bad because it reacted to the fact that people across the country did not like the poll tax. As a consequence, Parliament was representative, and reacted to the feelings and wishes of the people of Scotland and England.

I have no doubt that the White Paper holds the seeds of the dissolution of the United Kingdom. I believe that, for several reasons, some of which have been outlined already. We have debated English rights as opposed to Scottish rights, and I do not propose to repeat that aspect of the debate. However, I tell the Government that they are not only creating a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly but that they could, God forbid, be creating regional Parliaments in England.

[Mr. Day]

The White Paper is therefore part of a package and should not be seen in isolation. It is wrong to debate the proposals for Scotland in isolation. We debated the proposals for Wales in isolation, but I sincerely believe that proposals made from an isolated position will ultimately lead to constitutional isolation for the part of the United Kingdom to which they refer. That is the danger inherent in the proposals.

Let us consider the differing powers being debated for Wales and Scotland. There will inevitably be competition between the two to match the powers of the other. Wales has been denied the power to raise taxes, while Scotland has been granted the power to alter taxation levels. Wales will inevitably want the same. The proposals are a recipe for constant constitutional change and pressure within the United Kingdom.

When I consider the proposals for a Scottish Parliament, I realise that the English regions could face regional Assemblies. I do not know anyone in my constituency, or, indeed, anyone in the north-west region, who has any interest in having a regional Parliament in the north-west. I am sure that the same goes for every other part of England. Such a Parliament could be foisted on people in my part of the country in an attempt to answer the West Lothian question about representation. I have to tell the Government that it is a price that we in the north-west do not want to pay, thanks very much. The Government can leave that Assembly on the shelf where it belongs. We do not want an Assembly building in the north-west, with all its cost implications.

If the Government proceed with their proposals, I fear that my United Kingdom will cease to exist in perhaps 10 to 20 years. I resent the fact that, when those matters are discussed in Scotland or Wales, the debate will not be about the effect on the constitution of the United Kingdom as a whole. It will be purely about whether the Scots want a Parliament in Scotland or whether the Welsh want an Assembly in Wales. People will not be asked whether they want what will be the inevitable consequences for the United Kingdom. The British aspect of the debate is completely overlooked, which is a disgrace.

If, as I fear, the proposals in the White Paper hold the seeds of the dissolution of the United Kingdom, I accept that we have to consider alternatives, other than the status quo, which might just save the Union that I love so much. The Liberal Democrats have a proposal for a federal system. It is certainly the case that, in a system in which each constituent part of the whole has equal legislative rights and powers, the whole is more likely to survive as a single political entity. However, the United Kingdom does not debate such matters in federal terms in isolation from arrangements beyond its borders—we are in the European Union. I suspect that the morass of Government proposals will ultimately lead to some kind of federal arrangement, but such arrangements would also lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. A federal system for the United Kingdom within a federal Europe—a Europe of the regions—would leave nothing for this national United Kingdom Parliament to do.

The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) laughs, but I am making serious points. Anyone who knows the proposals of those who want a federal European state knows that the first step is to create a Europe of the regions. To bring that about, the power of existing national Parliaments must be destroyed by the creation of regional Parliaments. That is what the Government are proposing. Even if the powers of the Parliaments were equal in a European federal system, the United Kingdom would still break up. Any federal system would leave for this Parliament only the two main policy areas of defence and foreign affairs, which are the areas most coveted by the European Union.

Let us not kid ourselves. If we have Parliaments in our regions—in Scotland, in Wales, in Northern Ireland or in England—it will be impossible to guarantee the survival of the United Kingdom. Indeed, the United Kingdom would inevitably break up in those circumstances.

I do not want to lecture the Scottish people—or the English people—on what is best for them, but I ask the people of the United Kingdom to think about the British perspective. They should not just cast it aside. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who is no longer in his place, said that Scotland is now more Scottish and less British than it was. I suspect—in fact, I know—that that is true, but it is sad. However much pride we have in where we come from within the United Kingdom—we surely all have that—we count for nothing separately. These islands counted for nothing in the world until they came together. If we want to consign ourselves to the dustbin of history individually, Scotland will start the process by accepting the proposals in the White Paper.

Being British means far more than being English, Scottish or Welsh. It is time that those of us in this British Parliament had the guts to say so and remind the people of this United Kingdom what a privilege and a pleasure it is to live in such a great country.

7.42 pm

Dr. Lynda Clark (Edinburgh, Pentlands): I am afraid that I do not share the sadness of the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day). I hold the White Paper with pride, and I hope that its proposals will soon become a reality.

Conservative Members claim to be concerned about what they describe as anomalies in the proposed constitutional structure. They criticise the fact that Scottish Members may vote on English matters. The British Parliament has never been an exercise in academic logic. If it were, would we all be sitting here tonight? Would we have a system in which we would be arguing not about whether Scottish Members voted on English matters, but about whether Members who did not have a clue about the proposals voted at all? Our system is anomalous.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr. Clark: No, I will not.

In our system, the Queen in Parliament is sovereign. Any legislation approved by the Queen in Parliament is legal and constitutional. I have not heard or read in any of our debates of any attempts to change that system. The legal consequences of having such a system are that legislation that passes through Parliament defines the constitutional position. There is no point in talking about anomalies and unconstitutional matters. That is constitutional nonsense. If new proposals pass through both Houses of Parliament and the Queen gives Royal Assent, we shall have a new constitutional system, which will last until we change it.

No other country that claims to be a democracy has hereditary peers voting on legislation. Conservative Members have lived with that anomaly for many years. Left to themselves, no doubt they would go on living with that anomaly. That outweighs any other anomaly that the proposed constitutional changes may create. I am sure that Conservative Members will grow to love the new constitutional arrangements in the same way that they have grown to love other changes that they long opposed, such as votes for women—or perhaps they have not really grown to love that so much.

No constitutional lawyer will lose sleep over the possibility of a Scottish Member voting on legislation on English matters. I doubt whether many citizens—in England, Scotland or elsewhere in Britain—lie awake at night, tossing and turning, worrying about that.

The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) has led an ill-fated attack today. It may go down in history as a battle lost by generals, not the troops. There are many Conservative voters in Scotland shouting to be heard. They are trying to tell their leaders that devolution is the only hope for the Conservative party in Scotland.

The debate is not just about devolution: it is about democracy. The democratic process has cleared Conservative Members of Parliament out of Scotland. There is a lesson to be learned from that. Perhaps if the right hon. Gentleman had stayed in Scotland to fight for devolution and constitutional change, the Conservatives might have fared better. No doubt Scotland's loss is Devizes's gain. However, if all that he is offering is a toothless, wandering Scottish Grand Committee, it is perhaps as well that he made the change. In 20 years, the Conservatives have done nothing to meet the desire for constitutional change. They are afraid of it. Constitutional change is necessary and they must take a more positive attitude.

Conservative Members have suggested that the legislative system in Westminster has worked well for Scotland. As a Scots lawyer with more than 20 years' experience, I know that Scots law and development have suffered badly from the present system. I cannot believe that a Scottish Parliament would have insufficient time to debate issues raised by the Scottish Law Commission after they had been researched at great public expense. I cannot believe that, with a Scottish Parliament, there would be Scottish Law Commission reports on which no action was taken because of lack of parliamentary time. I cannot believe that a feudal system and the structure of land tenure in Scotland would have survived until now if there had been a Scottish Parliament.

There is much to be done. Much bad legislation has passed through this House on its way to Scotland. As a Scots lawyer, I have been struggling with it for the past 20 years, so hon. Members will understand that I am pretty fed up about it. I look forward to having a proper legislative Assembly that will give proper time and consideration to Scottish legislation. For that reason alone, I would vote for a Scottish Parliament, regardless of the more important policy matters.

I have great hopes for the future. We already have a devolved Executive and thousands of civil servants in St. Andrew's house, but we do not have a proper forum for detailed debate about Scottish issues or a proper system of democratic accountability. I look forward to the Bill that will follow the White Paper. I hope that it will lead to a Scottish Parliament.

7.49 pm

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Before I come to the meat of the White Paper, I want to say a little about the introduction, which has not been mentioned so far. I welcome the Government's commitment to have a referendum on proportional representation for elections to this Parliament. That is an important development which would help to do away with many of the anomalies of the past few years and much of the dissatisfaction with parliamentary government that is to be found throughout the whole of the United Kingdom. I also welcome the commitment to incorporate the European convention on human rights into English and Scots law. That has long been the policy of the Scottish National party and I am glad that it is now Government policy.

I welcome the White Paper because I welcome anything that brings some power back to the people of Scotland, no matter how little or how much. I am a supporter of the current system of having a Secretary of State for Scotland, even though we sometimes describe him as the governor-general. I was glad to hear him refer to the position of governor-general. I have always thought that he would look very stylish in a white helmet with feathers. Having a Secretary of State is better than the position in the 19th century when there was no Secretary of State.

The White Paper transfers significant areas of power back to the people of Scotland. I particularly welcome the fact that it deals with reserved powers and does not get into the mess of the Scotland Act 1978, which tried to lay down the powers that would be devolved rather than the powers that would be reserved. The proposed legislation will be much simpler.

I also welcome the fact that there is no attempt to place a glass ceiling on what the Scottish Parliament can discuss. The Scottish Parliament will be able to discuss any matters that it thinks are important to the people of Scotland. That is an important factor in trying to get all the people of Scotland to support the White Paper proposals.

I even welcome the recognition in the White Paper that the devolved scheme is subject to repeal by the Parliament at Westminster, despite the speeches by the Leader of the Opposition. We all know what one politician says one day can be contradicted the day after by his successor. The recognition that the Scottish Parliament could be abolished in future by Westminster will emphasise to Scots who wish to see a substantial Scottish Government that the only way in which to ensure that in perpetuity is to go for independence.

I welcome the fact that the Government have eventually fulfilled a pledge made by the no campaigners in the 1979 referendum. They said that people should vote no so that the Government could come back with a better scheme of devolution. One of the reasons for the extinction of the Conservative party in Scotland after 18 years in power is that it failed even to try to come back with a better scheme.

Annex A to the White Paper lists all the Scottish bodies that the Scottish Parliament is to control. My first reaction, and that of many other hon. Members, was astonishment at how many bodies there were. It speaks volumes for the record of the previous Government that they established so many unelected quangos in Scotland

[Mr. Alasdair Morgan]

with no democratic input or control. I am particularly glad to see that the Scottish Parliament will control the Scottish Standing Committee for the Calculation of Residual Values of Fertilisers and Feeding Stuffs. This is heady stuff. This is the stuff that will rock the foundations of the imperial Parliament. If the Parliament is to have powers like that, I can understand why Conservative Members are so deeply suspicious of the White Paper.

I now turn to representation. I feel that it would have been a more equitable method of representation, given that the Act of Union merged the two Parliaments of Scotland and of England, to have had an equal number of Members from Scotland and from England. The Secretary of State seems, however, to have lost a battle on Scottish representation at Westminster. Scottish representation at Westminster was set at 72 in 1885, and it has never fallen below 71 since then. In 1885, Scottish representation was proportional to English representation. When the Irish Members went away, the proportions changed, but the number of Scottish Members did not change.

It may be that, proportionately, Scots are over-represented in the Chamber, but that should have nothing to do with the White Paper proposals. It is sad that a commitment to reduce Scottish representation has been included in the White Paper. It should not be a trade-off against the West Lothian question, because it has nothing to do with it. Consideration of the representation of Scots at Westminster should be a separate exercise, especially given the commitment to consider proportional representation for this Chamber.

I want to look at some of the anomalies in the proposals. I do not do so to be obstructive, because I know that Conservative Members are capable of obstructiveness for its own sake. I accept that all systems have anomalies in them, but I know of no system with more anomalies than this Parliament. Some people, for example, automatically come to the Houses of Parliament by accident of birth, whereas the rest of us get one vote in the process of electing the person who will represent us in this Chamber.

Some functions that are currently marked down as reserved to the Westminster Parliament could safely be devolved to the Scottish Parliament even if people wish to maintain the United Kingdom and even if their reason for agreeing to the Government's proposals is to maintain the unity of the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) gave some examples of those functions earlier, and I will give one or two more.

The Scottish Parliament will be able to impose prohibition—I suspect that it will not—but it will not be able to alter the age limit for gambling. The Scottish Parliament will be able to outlaw alcopops, but it will not be able to outlaw scratch cards. The Scottish Parliament will be able to regulate lawyers—given the number of Scottish lawyers in politics, that may be a good thing—but it will not be able to regulate veterinary surgeons. It will be able to control the police, the fire service and the judiciary, but it will not be able to control the vital functions of architects and estate agents. It will be able to control the standard of foodstuffs, but not the standard of medicines. It will be able to control the release of prisoners who have been sent to gaol for terrorist offences, but it will not be able to control the definition of what constitutes a terrorist offence.

The Scottish Parliament will be able to vary the basic rate of income tax, but it will not be able to vary the size of the band to which the basic rate of income tax will apply. It will be responsible for the collection and publication of statistics, and for the publication of registers and records, but it will not be responsible for data protection, although all those records are now computerised. It will be able to make policy decisions, but it will not be able to regulate the civil service which is meant to put those policy decisions into practice.

I hope that, when we discuss the Bill that will follow the White Paper, the Government will accept amendments on some of those points, which will, I hope, be argued for constructively. I hope that they will resist the temptation to use their huge majority simply to steamroller through every proposal without accepting any changes to the detail. The Scottish people should be able to take mature decisions on many of the matters that are currently being reserved for Westminster.

There is a significant opportunity for the Scottish people. After almost 300 years, they will be able to take some decisions for themselves. The major question is whether they will want to take all the decisions for themselves. Only the Scottish people can answer that question. I am particularly glad that there is nothing in the White Paper that will prevent them from giving that answer themselves.

7.58 pm

Mrs. Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): I am grateful to be called to speak in a debate on a further important step towards changing the nature of politics in the United Kingdom. I refer specifically to the United Kingdom, to which the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) referred. It will remove power from a handful of people elected to the House and return it to the people.

The Opposition fail to understand that people voted for change. People knew what they were voting for at the general election. They voted for constitutional change—for a Scottish Parliament, a Welsh Assembly, London government and eventually regional government in England, if that is what the regions want. Unlike the hon. Member for Cheadle, I know many people in his part of the country who are already discussing the nature of a regional assembly. I have no fears about whether the people of England will welcome regional government as the Scots welcome a Scottish Parliament and the Welsh welcome an Assembly.

The Scottish Parliament will be different. It will have different electoral arrangements and every vote will count. No one will feel that his or her vote does not matter. It will provide much better representation for rural communities and far-flung peripheral areas. Most important, it will be different, because it will give political parties the opportunity to increase their representation of women and minority groups. Unlike the Opposition, I consider that extremely important. If we ignore the views of 50 per cent. of the population, we shall take bad decisions, as can happen in families. The remarks earlier about able men being elected on merit are a great insult to women.

Mr. Swayne: If women are unable to represent men and men are unable to represent women, can the hon. Lady explain how she can represent the views of all the males in her constituency? Surely the logic of her position is that each constituency should have two Members of Parliament to represent the two different classes of antithetical human beings.

Mrs. McKenna: The hon. Gentleman has demonstrated why there are so few Tories in the House. Clearly, he does not understand the issue. My constituents understand that I represent them all. However, if we ignore the views of 50 per cent. of the population and do not involve them in a decision-making process, we shall end up with wrong decisions. The views of some Opposition Members make it quite clear that they do not want women in the House for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with the decision-making process.

I now turn to the parliamentary arrangements. The Scottish Parliament will decide how best to conduct its business. I know that it will not be based on the silly rules that apply to the House and date back centuries, such as those whereby people hurl abuse at each other across the Chamber, as we have witnessed today. The Scottish Parliament will have modern working methods which will not be based on the premise that a practice should continue simply because it has always happened.

I hope that the Scottish Parliament will be much more family-friendly. If Opposition Members do not understand the importance of that, they should be aware of the quandary of hon. Members who wish to be with their families, particularly during school holidays. Because of the rules of the House, if Scottish Members have children, they are unable to spend time with them during the school holidays. They have to make difficult decisions, and are frequently decried for doing so.

When I first came to the House, someone told me that Parliament could be brutal in its treatment of Members. I sincerely hope that the Scottish Parliament will be quite different and that its Members will be treated with courtesy, respect and consideration. That certainly does not always happen in the House.

The nature of the Scottish Parliament will appeal to many people. It will be inclusive and non-confrontational. That appeals to the groups of young people whom I meet regularly. Politics has become discredited. I am extremely unhappy that my profession has become discredited because of the behaviour of a few. The Scottish Parliament will offer the beginning of an opportunity to change the nature of politics. Young people are enthused by the notion of inclusive politics and being able to express a point of view without constant interruption. We do not have to hurl abuse at each other. We can have strong views and be passionate about causes without constantly hurling abuse and interrupting each other. That is on offer from the Scottish Parliament and throughout the United Kingdom as we change the system.

Turning to the building that will house the Scottish Parliament, it is appropriate that a modern Parliament should be housed in a new building. I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman), who is not in his place. I do not consider that Holyrood house is appropriate. The Scottish Parliament should have a modern, accessible, friendly building. Edinburgh is the right place for it as the capital of Scotland.

A couple of points should be made about the cost of the Scottish Parliament. No one refers to the cost of maintaining the Westminster Parliament, as no one has a problem with the cost of democracy. It is just as important for Scotland. However, the cost of the Scottish Parliament will be but a fraction of that of the poll tax, and we should be happy to accept it.

The Scottish Parliament will take responsibility for health, education, anti-crime measures and job creation, all of which are important to the people of Scotland. It also begins to extend democratic control over the responsibilities currently undertaken by the Scottish Office. It will bring government closer to the people. For the past 18 years, we have had decisions with which we disagreed imposed on us. It is the beginning of the modernisation of democracy in the United Kingdom, and perhaps that is what most upsets the Opposition.

Mr. Dalyell: I have listened with extreme care to my hon. Friend, who was a very distinguished and effective chairman of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. However, am I unjustified in thinking that the Parliament which she describes will suck up many of the existing functions of local authorities?

Mrs. McKenna: Not at all. I spent a great deal of my time in local government protecting it from the Conservatives when they imposed the reorganisation of Scottish local government against the wishes of the entire Scottish population, as is evidenced by the fact that Scotland does not have a single Conservative council or Member of Parliament. I do not envisage a Parliament that will do that; I see one that will discuss with local government where the appropriate boundaries should be between the functions of local government and those of the Scottish Parliament. I am sure that that crucial debate will take place, but I do not envisage that the Scottish Parliament will suck up the powers of local authorities. I thank my hon. Friend for the opportunity to make that important point.

Yesterday, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) said that people cherished parliamentary democracy. It is not the first thing that my constituents rush up to me in the street to discuss. They are more concerned about jobs, health and education. If the right hon. Gentleman really cherishes parliamentary democracy, he should realise that the majority voted to change this country to a more participatory democracy, which is in touch with the people, understands their aspirations and recognises that, if everyone is involved in the decision-making process, better decisions, which people want to make work, are made.

I urge the Opposition to recognise the voice of the Scottish electorate and to support the White Paper. I really believe that we have a clean page on which to write. We have an opportunity to make the Scottish Parliament a world first, which, with the Welsh Assembly, London government and regional government in England, will secure the Union—a Union based not on the Westminster system but on a new Parliament for the new millennium.

8.9 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): I shall return to the speech of the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mrs. McKenna) in a few minutes.

As a retread, giving his first speech on returning to the House of Commons, I am one of those biological improbabilities—twice a maiden. Nothing has more convinced me that I am back in the House than listening to the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman). We found out that he reads books, likes architecture and wants federation—and it took him 19 minutes to tell us. *[Interruption.]* Such was my surprise that it took so long, I dropped my notes.

Any Government who are introducing legislation have two important duties. The first is to assess the possible impact of their proposals. The second is to attempt to reassure those who raise legitimate questions about what is suggested. That is particularly so when major, irrevocable constitutional changes are proposed.

Unlike the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, I do not agree that, by themselves, a large majority and a manifesto commitment are enough to fully legitimise new laws. A Government have to provide answers of substance to important objections, not just on matters of principle but on matters of detail. This Government have failed to do that with the devolution proposals. Instead, they have relied on, as we have heard time and again today, the old mantra, "Well, it was in the manifesto." I shall therefore reiterate some of the questions. This is the last opportunity before the referendum in six weeks' time for the Government to tell us and our constituents what, in their estimation, are the implications of their legislation.

Can the Government deny that the development of a new assembly in Scotland may create strains which could well pull apart the Union? How can they reassure us that the new layer of government will not become ever more hungry for more and more power? What reassurance can they give us that there will not be rivalry between a Scottish Parliament and Westminster? If that rivalry gives way to division and discord, how will they stop that being exploited by those who wish to see the break-up of the United Kingdom?

When the deal that the Secretary of State for Scotland has foisted on the UK is clearly understood in all its malignant detail, there will be justifiable anger throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland at the shabby injustice of what are partisan proposals. As the legitimacy of the Parliament to be will be based on a referendum in which the majority will have no vote, we may even find that some short-sighted English will start applauding the break-up of the Union. This Government have failed to explain why the Barnett formula will continue, with an English majority continuing to fund from their taxes higher spending in Scotland on matters that English Members of Parliament cannot influence.

Sir Robert Smith: There is much criticism of the proposal. Does that mean that those who are critical are happy with the status quo, or would they like the Scottish Office to be abolished? How else do they see the Scottish Office being made accountable? If they are worried about the break-up of the Union, they should be very worried about the fact that Scotland has a separate Government as it is. This debate is about making that separate Government accountable.

Mr. Sayeed: I would prefer the status quo. I do not believe that the proposals are sustainable in their current form. I believe that they are a Trojan horse that will lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. That is why I oppose them.

I shall carry on with the questions to which I should like—and to which I believe the House and the people of this country deserve—answers. We have had no satisfactory answer as to why it will possibly take until 2012 to reduce the over-representation of Scotland. Why cannot it be done sooner? Why cannot the Boundary Commission for Scotland report earlier, so that we can reduce the number of seats in Scotland to make representation closer to that in England—accepting, of course, that, in areas in the north where there is a higher rate of depopulation, there will be some over-representation? Such representation must be more realistic.

Nor have we been told why, on health, education and training, local government, social work, housing, economic development, transport, law, home affairs, the environment, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, ports, the arts and other matters, Scottish Members of Parliament will be able to speak and vote on English matters when they affect only England, but no English, Welsh or Northern Irish Member of Parliament will be permitted to vote on those matters as they affect Scotland—even though those who have no vote will foot most of the bills.

The White Paper is very clear: it says that a simple majority of those who vote will be sufficient to secure a "yes" to the largest constitutional change that this island has seen for hundreds of years. I asked the Secretary of State what would happen if the turnout was only 40 per cent. and there was a 60:40 vote in favour. I asked him whether he believed that that 24 per cent. of an artificially deflated electorate was sufficient to legitimise such irrevocable and major change. He could not answer; he did not answer. I hope that the Minister will answer in winding up.

We all heard the Prime Minister promise the leader of the Scottish National party a Bill before the referendum. At the very least, that would have permitted precise scrutiny of the undoubtedly bedevilling detail of the proposals. We now know that there will be no such Bill. I wonder why that change took place. If it had been a mere slip of the tongue and the Prime Minister had meant a White Paper and not a Bill, all he would have needed to say was, "I am sorry. I made a mistake. I am new in the job." That would have sufficed, but that did not happen—possibly, for different reasons.

One such reason might have been that the Prime Minister was just too arrogant to accept that he had made a mistake. It might have been that the Government belatedly recognised that, if the true implications of devolution saw the light of day, in all their legislative details, the anger of the majority in the United Kingdom would have been so enormous that they would have been thrown out.

I have no doubt that the Secretary of State for Scotland is feeling rather pleased with himself. He is pleased by the way in which he has cozened the Labour Cabinet, dominated by Scots, into proposing legislation so deeply damaging to the interests of the English majority. In doing so, he forgets that he is not a Minister in Scotland, but a Minister in a Government of the United Kingdom, and his principal duty as a Minister in that Government is to look after the whole United Kingdom, not an already over-represented minority.

The White Paper poses more questions than it seeks to answer. It fails to reassure on the fundamental questions of principle or to answer clear questions of detail. Tonight, Ministers have another chance to remedy that omission. Unless and until they do so, they will forfeit their claim to govern in the interests of the whole of the United Kingdom.

8.20 pm

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): The Government are seeking cross-party consensus on the Scottish Parliament, and to obtain the widest possible support and the most inclusive dialogue. For that reason, we welcome the widespread support for the White Paper. We would welcome the support of people of all parties and none in our campaign for a yes, yes vote in the referendum. Above all, when that vote has been delivered, we will try for a constructive dialogue with people from all parties as we create a Scottish Parliament.

With that in mind, we are glad that the Liberal Democrats and many representatives from civic groups were involved in our discussions in the Scottish Constitutional Convention. We welcome the Liberal Democrats' support in our campaign. We also welcome the vote by the Scottish National party executive last weekend, and we look forward with eager anticipation to the vote at that party's national council. We look forward to working with both parties on the yes, yes campaign.

We welcome the fact that some Scottish Conservatives have recognised that a Scottish Parliament is coming and have shown some willingness to co-operate. However, what can we say to people such as the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) who seem not to have learnt their lesson?

In my maiden speech, I quoted Cromwell's famous saying:

> "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken."

In all sincerity, I suggest that the Tories should have learnt their lesson from the election. You—I am sorry, I mean Conservative Members—may be in shock from the May result. I fear that you may be in greater shock after tonight—I refer to the possibility of headlines such as "Slaughter in Uxbridge". It is time to learn the lesson of Scotland.

> "Scotland sent you home to think again."

I apologise for saying "you", Mr. Deputy Speaker, but that was a quote from the song. You have been sent home—I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I will try to remember—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. May I gently make the point to the hon. Gentleman that the whole point of the custom of the House is to ensure that we choose our words carefully?

Mr. Savidge: Scotland sent the Tories home to think again, and surely that lesson should have been learnt. Scotland has proved their lack of thinking. For the Conservatives, Scotland has proved the converse of Descartes' famous statement, "They ceased to think, therefore they ceased to exist."

Let us remember the extent to which the Conservatives ceased to exist. There are no Scottish Members of Parliament, no Scottish Members of the European Parliament and no Scottish councils controlled by the Conservative party, and that shows that they should start to think again.

It would be too optimistic to hope that the Conservatives will have a Damascene conversion before the referendum, but, like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, I welcome the suggestion made at the weekend that the Leader of the Opposition was prepared to think again if the referendum delivered the expected result. If so, I hope that we will be able to work together constructively, instead of repeating tired arguments from the election. There is a place for combative politics, but there is also a place for consensus politics. We need consensus politics when we discuss the constitution, because the advantage of democracy should come before simple party advantage.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I am slightly curious about that point. There was a different settlement on 1 May, but what opportunity has the House had to discuss constitutional options and whether the White Paper was the right approach, as opposed to any other? We have had no opportunity to discuss the constitution in those terms. The hon. Gentleman, who is from my birthplace, makes a welcome argument, but many of us wish to engage in discussions, and have been frustrated by the management of business in the House.

Mr. Savidge: That is precisely the point that we wish to make. We will be interested in constructive discussion in Committee, if we get constructive proposals that do not resemble the 200 childish, irrelevant and frivolous amendments that were tabled to the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill. I urge Conservative Members to join in constructive discussion, but I appreciate some of the feelings that they have expressed about the future of the United Kingdom. I accept that their fears are genuine.

I have mentioned before that I am a mongrel, being half Scots and half English by birth and by residence. As a Member of Parliament, I expect to stay that way. I would say, as passionately as the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day), that I am British, but I am also Scottish.

The proposals will strengthen the Union. I recognise that some nationalists will wish to continue to work for independence after we have a Scottish Parliament, but I note the point that was made by their leader, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), when he said that nationalist views have strengthened in the past 18 years. I have noticed a strengthening of an anti-English nationalism among some young people—I accept that the Scottish nationalists do not necessarily welcome that—because of their resentment of too much centralised government and a refusal by the previous Government to recognise the feelings of the Scottish people.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Gentleman and I represent constituencies in the same part of the country. I hope that he will accept the point made by the hon. Member for

[Mrs. Ewing]

Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that, in all his years of experience of contesting elections with the Scottish National party, he has never experienced anti-English sentiment. Any time members of the SNP have expressed anti-English sentiments, they have been expelled immediately.

Mr. Savidge: I am happy to endorse that point, because that was the point which I sought to make. The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) mentioned how undesirable it was to have Scottish versus English and English versus Scottish, but those attitudes have been fed by the invidious process of over-centralism. At this point, I wish to bring in the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow, who is both honourable and my friend. However, I was surprised that in this debate he should have used a quote from Carson in relation to Ireland. Surely the lesson to be learned from that is that, if only the right steps had been taken a century ago, the tragic history of that country since then would never have occurred.

That must be a strong argument for starting to have true devolution. Far from being a nationalist, my soul and feeling are internationalist. Although I try to be a pragmatic politician, my long-term, distant vision is that we shall evolve to a system of world government and—dare I say as I see that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) has just left the Chamber—systems of continental and national government, all the way down to community councils, with proper subsidiarity throughout that process. A Scottish Parliament has a valid position in that, and would be properly regional in its outlook.

Central belt domination used to be one of the fears of people in north-east Scotland; however, people now feel much more confident, as is confirmed by opinion polls. In her maiden speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) said that our local paper in Aberdeen, the *Evening Express*, had a poll showing strong support for Scottish devolution.

In 1991, when I was a candidate in Kincardine and Deeside, opinion polls showed not only overwhelming support for devolution but that the majority of those who said that they would vote Conservative in that by-election—a by-election that the Conservatives lost—favoured devolution. A similar view was expressed in *The Scotsman*. In an exhaustive opinion poll, it showed that all areas of Scotland favour devolution. John Smith said that it was the settled will of the Scottish people; I believe that it is the settled will of people throughout Scotland.

Feelings about regionalism had been allayed partly because the system of proportional representation will be included in the Scottish Parliament. As the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan said yesterday, one advantage is that it will strengthen the position of minority parties. I have made facetious reference before to the fact that the Conservative party has been reduced to minority party status in Scotland. I agree with the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan that it is healthy for politics that the Conservatives should have an opportunity to be represented in the Scottish Parliament. It would not be healthy if their views were not represented. I do not necessarily favour proportional representation for the House of Commons, although I would favour it to create a proper revising second Chamber in the other place.

A Scottish Parliament can, however, set a radical example in other ways. It will be a new Parliament for a new millennium, capable of new thinking. One issue which has concerned us as we have discussed modernisation of the House is that it is difficult to get really novel thinking in this place. To some extent, many of our traditions are literally set in stone. Indeed, they are set in wood and stone, because it is difficult to consider even seating or voting changes without upsetting many people. Even since the war, the building has become hallowed in many people's memories and minds.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mrs. McKenna) said, a Scottish Parliament can set an example to Westminster in terms of new thinking. It can also set an example to English regional assemblies or even an English Parliament, as was suggested by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). He may be more correct on that than he was on people's views about the poll tax.

This is an historic Parliament because it enshrines our democratic history and its evolution; the Scottish Parliament will be historic because it will make history. The first historic date will be 11 September, when all the people of Scotland will have a chance to take part in the historic victory of a yes, yes campaign. It will be an historic victory for Scotland, for Britain and for democracy.

8.33 pm

Mr. Donald Gorrie (Edinburgh, West): I congratulate the Secretary of State for Scotland—I hope that his colleagues will pass on my congratulations. He genuinely deserves great credit for standing up to the opposition, both in front of him and, in some cases, according to the newspapers, behind him, who tried to water down the Bill and the White Paper.

The White Paper is excellent, although it is certainly not perfect and can be improved. Even the Almighty took seven days to create the world, and he had two testaments. Perhaps this is the old testament White Paper and we shall have a new testament White Paper. It is at least a good testament on which we can build.

Some of the weaknesses have been illustrated by the two excellent speeches from Scottish National party Members who pointed out some of the anomalies. The Liberal Democrats feel that moral issues should be brought within the scope of a Scottish Parliament. A regulatory gremlin seems to have got into the White Paper and there are all sorts of issues on which a Scottish Parliament cannot regulate, because the uniformists have obviously won. The Scottish Parliament should control matters such as broadcasting.

Overall, it is a good package for which we are happy to campaign. Like the Scottish National party, the Liberal Democrats would like to go further in due course, but the White Paper is a good basis for a Scottish Parliament and for the form of the whole United Kingdom.

Conservative Members' doom and gloom are often genuine. They think that devolution is apocalyptic and that the world as they know it is about to collapse. They have no reason to believe that. They are like tipsters who still support a horse that they tipped in the general election and that came last. The horse just does not run. The public are not in tune with their ideas and their historical analysis is entirely incorrect. As a previous speaker said, the example of Ireland shows that the Opposition of the day should have taken a constructive attitude to Gladstone's efforts to have an Irish Parliament. They should have improved his proposals, which were faulty but were at least a serious attempt, instead of blocking them. As a direct result, people in Ireland were, until very recently, still killing each other.

Mr. Day: If one looks at Irish history, one sees that the creation of the free state, which the cleverer nationalists subscribed to and supported, had all the trappings of the British state, with the oath of allegiance, Crown forces and the rest of it. Within a short time, however, all that had gone; the link with the Crown had gone and Ireland had become a republic. The Irish experience does not necessarily prove that the present proposals would save Scotland from a similar fate.

Mr. Gorrie: The point is that the Irish were not given their independence, or whatever they wanted, in a federal system at the time. They achieved it through the gun and extremely grudgingly, because the Conservatives managed to stop successive Liberal Democrat efforts generously to give them their own Parliament.

If the Conservatives persist in rejecting any endeavour to improve how the United Kingdom runs, they will break it up. I shall now try to be a tipster. The only bet that I have placed in recent years was on myself to win the general election, so I have a 100 per cent. record.

Mr. Ancram: Did the hon. Gentleman bet on the previous three elections?

Mr. Gorrie: I did not bet, but I had some idea where the truth lay.

The Conservatives, who genuinely have a mystical idea about the Union, risk destroying the Union by not looking at what the public want, especially in Scotland, but also in England. Basically, the Conservatives do not trust the Scots. They have an extraordinary idea that the Scots will legislate in an anti-British spirit, and that we are a bunch of peasants who are not to be trusted. That is simply not true. That is the thinking behind the Conservatives' views. *[Interruption.]*

I can say in all honesty that that is the message that comes across, not only to us but to Government Members. They have said that. The message is, "You have no confidence in the ability of the Scots to run their own affairs." Because it will have proportional representation, the Scots Parliament will be more responsive and more responsible to the Scottish people than this place.

The other issue which I should like to stress is that various people have said that the worm will turn. It is time that the English lion roared. We would welcome that. We believe that having a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly will cause the English to examine how they wish their affairs to be run. If the English want an English Parliament, or if they want a regional structure, that is great; they should get on with it. The logic behind the various speeches that have been made—that, because the English are not, at the moment, offered anything, the Scots cannot be offered anything either—is just not acceptable. The Scots have discussed this for years. There is a very strong majority view in Scotland that there must be a change.

Mr. Swinney: The logic of the hon. Gentleman's argument is that, in all respects, peoples, as they define themselves, should have a right to self-determination. That seems to be the point that he is arguing about Scotland and England.

Mr. Gorrie: Absolutely. We in Scotland believe that sovereignty lies with the people—that sovereignty in Scotland lies with the Scottish people, and in England with the English people. We do not wish to prejudice the English in any way whatever. I honestly do not see in what way these proposals are prejudicing them; in the past, however, 500 or more English Members of Parliament consistently voted through laws that the majority of the Scots were against and that were quite harmful to Scotland. That is the problem—not the fact that there might occasionally be some Scots voting on an issue and the English could not reciprocate.

Dr. Fox: That is exactly the point. The English are being prejudiced by this arrangement when Scots can vote on English issues, but not vice versa. The hon. Gentleman would be consistent if he made the case for a federal system, which has been suggested by the Liberal Democrats on other occasions. The hon. Gentleman's case is not logical in the way in which it has been presented today. It is another part of the bogus Liberal Democrat love-in with the Labour party.

Mr. Gorrie: If the Conservatives had their way, we would never get any change in anything. In the real world, we are trying to get a change. We would like a greater change to a federal system.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gorrie: No. Let me make my point.

The Scottish National party would like a change to independence, but we both accept that there is a very responsible and worthwhile Scottish Parliament on offer as a first stage. The next stage is that the English have to get their act together. Hitherto, they have not done that. That is what is now called for.

We can look forward to a Scottish Parliament that will, as other hon. Members have said, have a new way of doing things and be inclusive. Let us get on with it and make it a success. We have an opportunity to do things better, to learn from the dreadful mistakes of this place, to learn the best practice from here and from elsewhere, and to do things better. We can offer either the politics of fear, which the Conservatives offer, or the politics of hope, which the White Paper offers. Let us go for hope. Let us go for the White Paper.

8.43 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): One of the disadvantages of being called more than five hours into any debate is that many of the points that are worth making have already been made. Therefore, I shall try not to be repetitive and will try to make a few fresh points, but, first, I shall respond to some of the comments that have been made, particularly from those who would describe themselves as the official Opposition.

I am really depressed, although never surprised, by the repeated failure of the Tory Opposition to rise to the occasion in debates such as this, which are about a

[Mr. John McAllion]

momentous turning point in the history of Scotland and, indeed, the United Kingdom. The tenor of speeches from Conservative Members has been disgraceful. It began with the obvious and appalling ignorance on all matters Scottish.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) intervened during the speech of his Front-Bench spokesman, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), with the "news", according to the hon. Member, that he had overheard some SNP Members talking on the Back Benches. What do they want? Goodness gracious, they want an independent Scotland. They do not want any Scottish representation in the House. That is news to the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps it is also news to Conservative Front-Bench Members. Lord Renton, who was mentioned by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), has nothing on the ignorance shown by Conservative Members in this place.

Then there was the mean-spirited, spiteful and anti-Scottish nit-picking from Conservative Members. Indeed, the debate began very badly with a point of order by a Conservative Member about the number of Scottish Members who were present. When that point of order was raised, there were 46 Members in the Chamber—46 out of 652—and more than half of them represented Scottish constituencies. Usually, there is only one Scottish Member of Parliament for every nine Members of the United Kingdom Parliament. On this occasion, there was more than one of us for every two of them. Where were the English Members at the beginning of the debate? They are always telling us, "This is a matter of profound importance to the English people. This is a matter which affects every English Member in the House." Where were they?

We have the usual suspects present, including the English nationalist wing of the Tory party. The Euro-sceptic wing of the Tory party is here to knock any change whatever. Also taking part in the debate are the exiled Scots, of whom Dr. Johnson once said that the finest prospect that they see is the road that leads south to England, away from their own country.

I do not have any time for any criticisms levelled in the debate by Conservative Members. Nor do the people of Scotland. That is why the Opposition do not have a single Member representing a Scottish constituency. That is exactly what they deserve.

With apologies to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), Conservative Members brought up the hoary old chestnut about the West Lothian question. It does not cause me any problem, and I do not think that it causes Scottish Members or the Scottish people any problem whatever. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) has been saying for some time, we have been debating devolution in Scotland for the past 30 years. We formed a Scottish Constitutional Convention. We brought forward a detailed scheme. We knew that, if a Labour Government were elected at the general election, their first priority would be to introduce a Bill for a devolved Scottish Parliament.

The English people have made no such demand at any point. That is their choice. If they choose to have their domestic legislation dealt with by a British Parliament—this is a British Parliament—that is their choice. They cannot complain if Members representing Scottish constituencies take part in debates involving grammar schools or anything else in England. They cannot complain if a Member representing a Scottish constituency sits in a British Cabinet and takes decisions that affect English people.

The English people have a solution to the West Lothian question—they can opt for their own devolved English Parliament. They can even opt for independence. They would have my support if they wanted it, but they would not be able to take the North sea oil reserves if they went for independence. We would keep those for ourselves. They are entirely welcome to go down that road if they wish; they would have my blessing.

The hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) spent most of his speech denouncing nationalism, but he wrapped himself throughout in the Union Jack, in a form of British nationalism that was no different from the nationalism that is represented elsewhere on the Conservative Benches. He is not against nationalism. He is against Scottish nationalism, English nationalism or Irish nationalism, but not British nationalism.

Mr. Day: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. As always, he is being generous and humorous in equal measure.

Yes, the Union Jack is my flag. I am proud to say that, but I do not count myself as a British nationalist. I despise nationalism of all sorts. It creates tensions and differences between people. Love of one's country is patriotism, and it is a very different creed.

Mr. McAllion: I should like to believe the hon. Gentleman, because I believe that he is genuinely an honourable gentleman, but, towards the end of his speech, he gave himself away. It turned out to be another Euro-sceptic speech. He wants not so much British nationalism as Britain out of Europe. He does not want any power to be taken away from the British Parliament. He is a British nationalist in every sense of the word. His contribution was far more nationalist than most speeches made from the nationalist Benches, or even from the Conservative Benches.

The only positive point that I heard from the official Opposition during the debate was that made by the right hon. Member for Devizes when he described my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland as a dangerous man. I think that my right hon. Friend was secretly thrilled to be described as dangerous. He has had a good week. During the past week, he has been likened to Robert the Bruce, Braveheart and Keir Hardie, and now he has been described as dangerous. I dare say that there is not a woman of a certain generation in Scotland who is not now extremely interested in my right hon. Friend. I am sure that he will be delighted if he continues to be so described.

I welcome the White Paper's proposals for a Scottish Parliament. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow, I am delighted by the choice of 11 September for the referendum in Scotland. I have no problem with 11 September being the 700th anniversary of the battle of Stirling bridge. In fact, it creates a nice sense of history, a sense of occasion, for the referendum for a Scottish Parliament to be held on that day. It is in no way anti-English. My hon. Friend was wrong to criticise the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) for mentioning it.

The battle of Stirling bridge was a milestone in the wars of independence which led to the creation of an independent state in Scotland. It is something of which Scots should be proud, not ashamed. It is not something which they should hide away and not talk about in case it alarms the neighbours. It is something we believe in. It is a good thing for Scotland. I am delighted that it was mentioned by the hon. Lady.

I was a Member of the House at the time of the tricentenary of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which was the foundation of the current state. I do not remember my hon. Friend objecting to the celebrations that surrounded that tricentenary, yet that was based on the suppression of the Irish people. One could argue that it was anti-Irish. Why were people not criticising the tricentenary celebrations of the Glorious Revolution?

Mr. Dalyell: I did object to them.

Mr. McAllion: For once, my hon. Friend has got me. However, I was surprised that he quoted Edward Carson as an example of what the United Kingdom stands for. If I remember rightly, Carson was the man who said, "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right," in defiance of the democratically expressed wishes of the United Kingdom Parliament. That is not the kind of example to which someone who believes in the United Kingdom Parliament should refer. I was surprised at my hon. Friend for making that observation.

I am pleased that 11 September is the date for the Scottish referendum. In future, that day will be remembered not just for the battle of Stirling bridge, but as the date on which the Scottish people had the courage and determination to vote to bring back to their own country Scottish democracy and a Scottish Parliament. It will be remembered for ever more for that reason.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that it is important to remember the reception that the White Paper has had in Scotland. It has had a hostile reception here tonight, but it has had a marvellous reception in Scotland. Everywhere, politicians, political activists, the press, other media, and even the public have been delighted with the proposals. It is not often that the public are delighted by the same things as politicians, so it is nice when it happens. It has created the incredible circumstances in Scotland in which the Scottish Labour party and the Scottish National party, which have been at each other's throats for the past generation, have come together to fight for the same proposals. That is one of the most exciting things to happen in my country for a long time.

Mr. Dalyell: Will my hon. Friend solve a mystery for me? We were told on Thursday night last week that the public were delighted. On Thursday night, most of them could not have obtained copies of the White Paper, let alone read it.

Mr. McAllion: My hon. Friend often exaggerates his case, and I should be free to exaggerate mine as well.

The only really sour notes that have been struck today, apart from those by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and the Tory Opposition, have been by some elements of big business. *The Scotsman* this morning reported that Sir Alistair Grant—it is funny how these big business people always have names like Alistair—chairman of Scottish Newcastle, has warned against a Scottish Parliament because it will threaten investment into Scotland, make Scottish exports uncompetitive and generally be bad for the Scottish economy.

Sir Alistair, and big business in general, are entitled to their point of view, but hon. Members should be conscious of the track record of big business on political matters over a long period. For example, big business thought that the universal franchise, giving the vote to the workers, was a bad thing. It thought that it was a bad thing that trade unions should be given legal protection. It still does. It thought that it was a bad thing that taxes should be raised to pay for the NHS and the welfare state. It still thinks that it is a bad thing to have a national minimum wage to take people out of poverty wages. It thinks that it is a really bad thing for anyone to suggest that there should be democracy in the workplace and that workers should have a say in what happens in their companies.

The political judgment of big business is usually self-serving, almost always reactionary and deeply anti-democratic. If Keir Hardie had listened to the views of big business in his day, he would never have set up the Labour party. I am glad that he did not listen to its views. My advice to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench is to follow in the footsteps of Keir Hardie and not listen to the views of Sir Alistair Grant or anyone else in big business, whether or not they are on the cocktail circuit.

I want to focus on two of the main arguments against a Scottish Parliament. The first is the alleged damage that opponents say will arise because of the tax-varying powers that will be given to that Parliament. We have already heard many of the scare stories associated with that—the extra tax burden on individuals who live and work in Scotland; the possible widening of the tax base by a Scottish Parliament which is beyond the control of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in this House—that really worries many hon. Members here—and the impact of those extra taxes on the competitiveness of the Scottish economy.

Those arguments chime with the prevailing orthodoxy in the House, perhaps on both sides, that low taxes and low levels of public spending are the only keys to economic success in the modern world. There is nothing new or modern about that orthodoxy. It has been the prevailing orthodoxy of most Tory Governments during the past century. I do not agree with it. I reject the notion that raising taxes and increasing public spending must, by definition, disadvantage the Scottish economy or any other economy.

Scottish business can be equally damaged by a failure to raise public revenue for investment in the social and economic infrastructure. For example, does any hon. Member believe that it would not be in the interests of Scottish business for Scotland to have a fully integrated public transport system? Of course that would be to the advantage of Scottish business. But that cannot happen unless we raise taxes and the level of public spending. That is a lesson that must be learned by the House at some point.

Mr. Swinney: I am grateful to my neighbour from Dundee, East for giving way. Is he satisfied that the

[Mr. Swinney]

proposed Scottish Parliament has sufficient powers to address the concerns that he has raised, with which I absolutely agree?

Mr. McAllion: I am never satisfied with anything—that is part of my nature. I am always looking for a little bit extra in any situation. But that is a serious point. We should not allow to go unchallenged the orthodoxy that says that public spending is a bad thing and is bad for business. Public spending is a good thing and can be good for business.

My wife went to Holland for a medical conference and she could not believe the integrated transport structure there. Trains go straight into the airport. One leaves a beautiful train and climbs aboard a plane to fly off. Try getting out of this place—getting from here to Heathrow is a nightmare. The underground system of this great capital city is screaming out for public investment. The public want taxes to be raised to pay for the transport infrastructure to make this country more economic.

Is anyone arguing that modern and well-equipped schools providing first-class education for all would not give us a competitive advantage over other countries? Of course they would. Is anybody arguing that the costs of crime are not crippling business? What causes those costs? Unemployment, poverty, deprivation and homelessness cause them. Those require public spending, and I have no problems with a Scottish Parliament having tax-raising powers. I shall be arguing in the referendum campaign that those powers should not only be given, but be used. Properly applied, the higher public spending which those tax-varying powers will unlock will be a significant advantage to the Scottish people, business and the economy.

The final point that I should like to make—unless my hon. Friends want me to continue to prevent Tory Members from getting in—concerns the argument that the White Paper proposals constitute a slippery slope to independence. As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow has put it, this is a one-way motorway with no exits, whose destination is the break-up of the UK. We have heard a lot about that tonight.

My first reaction is to echo the Scottish writer Willie McIllvaney, who wrote:

> "To reject devolution because it might lead further is equivalent to a refusal to engage in argument because you might have to change your mind."

Willie, as always, was absolutely right. Scotland will go down the road to independence only when the people who live in Scotland are convinced by the argument. That is the basic reality. It will not be because of a Parliament here or an Assembly there, but because they believe that it is in their interests to have independence. There is no other way in which independence will come to Scotland.

I suspect that those who go on about slippery slopes and one-way motorways are uncertain about their own arguments for maintaining the status quo. They hide behind Jeremiah warnings, accusing the Parliament proposed in the White Paper of being something that it palpably is not. If they were honest with themselves, they would argue coherently and consistently why it is in the interests of the Scottish people to continue to be governed directly from this Parliament 400 miles away. That should be the basis of their case—not nonsense threats or warnings about where a Scottish Parliament set up in Edinburgh might or might not lead.

That argument takes us on to the dangerous ground of sovereignty, which has been touched on by some hon. Members. I make no apology—I signed the Claim of Right for Scotland because I believed in it. I fully accept that the people of Scotland have the sovereign right to decide for themselves how and by whom they are governed. The English people and all other British people also have that sovereign right.

I find it inexplicable that any democrat or socialist could believe for a moment that sovereignty should be vested in the Westminster Parliament rather than in the people who elect the Westminster Parliament. This Parliament—or, to give it its full sovereign title, the Queen in Parliament—is only partly elected. This is the only elected part of the Westminster Parliament, which is only partly modern. It is still partly mediaeval, as would become obvious to anyone witnessing the state opening of Parliament by the Queen in her regalia and finery from the middle ages. If we want to modernise our political institutions, we have to begin by accepting the basis of every modern democracy in the developed world—that sovereignty rests with the people and with no one else.

The theory of the supreme sovereignty of Parliament has been breached by the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union. European laws have primacy over the laws passed by this Westminster Parliament. To paraphrase an old song by the Proclaimers, it was "sovereignty no more" for this Parliament when we became members of the EU. The Scottish Constitutional Convention, in its final report "Scotland's Parliament, Scotland's Right", noted that while, in theory, under the unwritten constitution of the United Kingdom, any Scotland Act could be repealed or amended without restriction by any subsequent Westminster Parliament, in practice such an action would be politically impossible.

Using as an example the entrenched rights of the Church of Scotland under the unwritten constitution of the UK, the report recommended that similar entrenchment should be made available for the Scottish Parliament to make it impossible to repeal or to amend a Scotland Act without the prior approval of the Scottish Parliament or the Scottish people in a further referendum. I note that that recommendation has not been acted on—quite the reverse. The White Paper makes it clear that the UK Parliament will remain sovereign. I know that that is a necessary compromise to get anything through a UK Cabinet and Parliament. We all know the reality—it does not make much difference.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear—and, indeed, as the Leader of the Opposition has made clear—no United Kingdom Government would or could ever deny the Scottish people the right to decide for themselves how they are to be governed. Lady Thatcher accepted that as a reality, although she had no time for the Scots during her long period in office. The right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), who fought the last general election on the basis that he would retain the United Kingdom's integrity, accepted it as a reality.

If, having been convinced by the arguments for it, the Scottish people voted for independence, any Government who described themselves as democratic in any meaningful sense would have to accept that decision. Every hon. Member knows that that is the truth; there is no point in pretending that it is not. The people will decide, not politicians in this place or anywhere else. As far as I can see, however, all the evidence suggests that the Scottish people are not yet convinced by the arguments for independence—although I suspect that they would become so if the Government failed to implement the proposals in the White Paper, for whatever reason.

One thing is certain. Opposition Members who do not live in Scotland—who go there occasionally to fish, hunt or whatever—should accept that there is no future for the constitutional status quo in Scotland, which was decisively rejected by the Scottish people when they announced the change in the mandate. The question, of course, is the degree of the change that they demanded.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow said that it was not possible to ride two horses at the same time—that we must be either in or outside the United Kingdom—but I do not accept that. No one uses the same argument in relation to the European Union. It is quite the reverse: the United Kingdom is in and out of Europe at the same time. Despite the boasts about the opt-outs that Britain has, we are partly in and partly out. If the single currency goes ahead, Britain may be in and it may be out.

The position is exactly the same in this context. Sovereignty can be shared by the same people across different Parliaments. The Scottish people can decide to be in the European Union, and to concede some of their sovereignty to that institution. They can decide to be in this Parliament and concede some of their sovereignty to it, and they can decide to have their own Parliament and to concede the rest of that sovereignty. It is not impossible to achieve that; it is very easy. It has been achieved in other democratic modern constitutions.

I see many arguments for retaining the United Kingdom. I see no sense in arguing for the break-up of the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force or the Army, or for different social security systems in the north and the south of this island. There should be a single integrated social security system—although it should be much better than the pathetic system that we have now, which victimises the poor in a very obvious way. Nor am I convinced by the arguments for a separate Scottish currency. I do not think that that would be in the interests of the Scottish people.

I am delighted, and convinced, by the proposals in the White Paper. As someone who has been committed to home rule for Scotland throughout my political life, seeing it as a priority, I am enthusiastic about the Scottish Parliament that is envisaged in the White Paper: I feel that I can fight for it. It is a Parliament which will be widely welcomed across Scotland. I do not think that the Scottish people are ready for separation, and I think that every election, every opinion poll and every referendum in Scotland has shown that to be the case.

The new Parliament will excite the people of Scotland. I do not fear proportional representation. I recognise that electoral systems are not run for the benefit of political parties; they are run for the benefit of those who elect political parties in to office. The first-past-the-post system disfranchises far too many people. The Scottish Parliament will not be dominated by any party or any area; it will be a genuine people's Parliament, about which all Scotland can be enthusiastic.

Female Labour Members argued strongly in favour of a Parliament that would give women equal representation. In a thousand years of history, the Westminster Parliament has not come near to achieving that, but it could be achieved on day one in a Scottish Parliament. Such a Parliament could show the advantage of being prepared to change the constitution, and to go with opinion. I believe that the new Parliament will be sensitive to Scotland's needs, and that it will be in touch with the people of Scotland in general. In short, it will be everything that this Parliament is not.

Some hon. Members have argued against constitutional change. They fear it. Someone said that it is malignant, which makes one think of crosses and garlic on the doors to keep out the idea that constitutional change may find its way into this august Chamber, which has remained unchanged for so long. Those hon. Members argued that the workplace, trade union rights, the welfare state and the national health service have to change. Everything has to change except this place. I do not accept that; nor do my hon. Friends. The time for constitutional change is long past. Let us get to it and win the referendum.

9.9 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Some elements of the debate have been deeply disturbing. One is the attitude of mind that has been ascribed to Conservative Members. I treat with some disdain the remark by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) that we are occasional visitors to Scotland for hunting, shooting and fishing. That is nonsense. I do not accept the comment by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) that Conservatives do not trust the Scots. That is also nonsense. Even worse was the remark by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) who said that Conservatives were anti-Scottish. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: It is early in my speech, but of course I shall give way.

Mr. Salmond: In last night's debate and today, I have said that opinion poll evidence shows that the vast majority of the Scottish population perceive the Conservative party as anti-Scottish. One poll showed that a majority of people who intended to vote Tory still thought that the party was anti-Scottish. Does not the hon. Gentleman wish to address that rather grave situation?

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman is reeling off the truth of the Scottish National party and the old nostrum that nationalists hate other people's countries and patriots love their own countries. Conservatives are true Scottish patriots, true British patriots and true English patriots. We love our nation and we are not prepared to see it destroyed, which is what Labour and the SNP would have us accept. I am proud to speak as a Scot. I was born, bred and educated at primary and secondary school and at university in Scotland and I never left its borders until I was 21. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. There are many conversations in the Chamber. There should be only one speaker.

Mr. Gray: My father was moderator of the general assembly of the Church of Scotland. The very title has Scottish resonance. I will not accept insults from hon.

[Mr. Gray]

Members because I appear and sound English. I am 100 per cent. Scottish and I intend to speak for Scotland although I represent an English constituency.

Mr. Swinney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: No. I have given way already. Enough has been said about my Scottishness and I hope that I have established my Scottish credentials.

I feel no embarrassment whatever in saying that I am appalled by the entire content of the White Paper and its consequences for Scotland and England and, more importantly, for the United Kingdom. Some hon. Members have alluded to the West Lothian question, which was so eloquently described, as on many earlier occasions, by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). Others have spoken about incipient English nationalism and its potentially terrible consequences for the United Kingdom.

I should like to concentrate on one risk that arises from the Scottish Assembly—the issue of taxation. It sounds anodyne to speak about tax-varying powers of up to 3p in the pound, but it is a great deal more worrying to speak about a cost of £321 a year for the average wage earner or £650 a year for someone earning £30,000. Those figures sound like a significant price to be paid. Perhaps on 11 September the people of Scotland will ignore that price. The average GP may say, "I am prepared to pay £600 for the privilege of a Scottish Parliament." Are people certain that the price for all time will be £621 for a person on a salary of £30,000? I suggest that it will not.

The Scottish Parliament will properly say, "We are the duly elected representatives of the people of Scotland. We have been elected and given a mandate"—as the Labour party constantly tells us it has been given here—"by the people of Scotland to do all sorts of noble and worthwhile things." I am sure that, for a time, all those things will be done within the 3p in the pound.

The Minister without Portfolio will ensure that there is no possible cross-border embarrassment of a Labour Parliament in Scotland doing something that the Labour Government here does not wish it to do, but imagine that there was a Conservative Government here and a Labour Parliament in Scotland, or even that there was a hard-left Labour Parliament in Scotland, but a Mandelsonian-Blairite Labour Government here. Let us imagine that the duly elected representatives of the Scottish people decided to put teachers' pay up by 20 per cent., to spend another £20 million on roads or to make a host of other legitimate spending decisions that would cost more than 3p in the pound.

What would happen then? There would be three possibilities. The first is that those representatives would do what many Labour councils throughout the land have always done: bust their cap, decide to ignore the 3p in the pound limit and crack on with their spending. Secondly, they could force through some subsequent legislation that would allow them much greater tax variations than 3p in the pound. Would it be 10p or 20p in the pound? Who knows where it would end up?

The third and by far the most likely outcome is that those representatives would say that the block grant was insufficient. They would say, "We, the duly elected representatives of the Scottish people, have taken these sensible decisions. These are things that everyone wants. We cannot do it within our 3p in the pound because those swine, our paymasters in Westminster, will not give us the cash to do it." Therefore, an incipient and inherent tax bombshell would tick away beneath the Scottish Parliament.

Sir Robert Smith: The hon. Gentleman seems to be confirming what hon. Members were saying earlier: the tenor of the debate is a lack of trust in the people of Scotland. The actions that have been described would be the actions of people elected by the people of Scotland. The hon. Member seems to assume and to take it for granted that his party has no chance of a revival, yet it is the only party in the history of Scotland to have had a majority of the vote in Scotland. Under the White Paper, it would be legitimate for the people of Scotland to vote for his party to cut taxes in Scotland.

Mr. Gray: That is, of course, true. Let us imagine that we have a Conservative Parliament in Scotland, but a Labour Government here. Exactly the same problem might arise. Those Conservative representatives might make sensible, legitimate decisions on behalf of the people of Scotland, which would effectively be blocked by Members here.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: I think that we have had enough discussion on that point for the moment. I am short of time, and I know that other hon. Members want to speak.

There is a curious conundrum here. The Labour party says that it does not approve of capping in local government, that capping is somehow a bad thing and that we must allow local government to spend up to whatever levels elected councillors want, but the 3p in the pound is the ultimate cap. It is capping second to none. The tax-varying powers of the Scottish Parliament are capped to only 3 per cent., whereas, in local government, councillors raise 20 or 25 per cent. for their own spending.

The ultimate cap is exactly what the Labour party is trying to get away from in local government. Therefore, it is only a matter of time before the duly elected representatives of the Scottish Parliament say, "We do not want this 3p in the pound cap. We do not see why English Members in Westminster should set down how much we should spend. We are the representatives of the Scottish people. We will decide how much is spent, and we will tax them accordingly."

I do not accept that the Scottish people believe that they will pay only £300 a year if they are ordinary wage earners, or £600 a year if they are middle-class wage earners. I suspect that they think that in passing, but that, between now and 11 September, they will realise that they are signing a substantial blank cheque, which will cost them and their families for many generations to come.

As soon as the stresses and strains in spending come about, it will only be a matter of time before the Scottish nationalists and others have their way and say, "We want none of this English interference in our way of life. We want our independence." It will only be a matter of time before people in English constituencies say, "Why are the people of Scotland taking spending decisions and demanding more spending powers while we are, to some degree, subsidising them?" I suspect that many of my constituents in North Wiltshire will say, "If they want their independence, let them go. Let them take their subsidies and their 72 Members of Parliament with them. They can drop us a postcard when they want to rejoin the main stream of British life." I would have great difficulty arguing against that with my constituents.

This is the thin end of the independence wedge, and it is the beginning of the end for the Union.

9.21 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I am delighted that the Secretary of State for Scotland feels that it is safe to return to the Chamber now that his hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) has sat down. We noticed that, by his departure, he managed to avoid his ears being burnt by the sounds of Keir Hardie emanating from the Back Benches. All is safe and well now, and I am delighted that he is here to listen to me.

We should be under no illusions about the seriousness of this debate. It is a debate about the future of these islands. It deals with the structure of the kingdom, which has remained largely intact for the past 300 years. I understand why Labour Members say that, because the Conservative party did so badly in Scotland at the general election, we should bow to their will and accept the White Paper. The truth is that, notwithstanding what happened to the Conservative party in Scotland, we would be failing in our duty if we did not point out the serious damage that the White Paper is likely to do to the kingdom.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not give way.

Although I represent an English constituency, like the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge), I am an Anglo-Scot. I am proud to come from Scotland in the sense that my mother is a Douglas from the Borders, so I come from a long line of rapers and pillagers. My grandfather—

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would not be allowed to call the hon. Gentleman a raper and pillager. Is it in order for him to call himself a raper and pillager?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman was being light-hearted.

Mr. Howarth: I was being rather serious. I was explaining my ancestry, not my present practices. My grandfather, Thomas Douglas, thought that the best feature of the English was that they were able to produce such a large number of excellent women for Scotsmen to marry. He duly went off to Cheshire—I think the only time he came south of the border—to find an English wife.

We are as qualified to participate in these debates as anybody who represents a constituency north of the border. This is the United Kingdom Parliament, and these are matters which strike at the heart of the unity of the kingdom.

I believe that the proposals in the White Paper are deeply damaging to the interests of the United Kingdom and to Scotland in particular. They are bureaucratic and expensive and will turn out to be a lawyers' paradise. Most important, they are a recipe for conflict. Ultimately, they will be the first steps on the road to the balkanisation of Britain, which will lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. It is for that reason that the Scottish National party is prepared to support the proposals. It sees them as the Trojan horse.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: No.

The Scottish National party sees the proposals as a Trojan horse to help its open ambition for an independent Scotland.

Mr. Flynn *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman had his say last Friday.

Mr. Flynn: No, I did not.

Mr. Howarth: Well, as a Welsh Member of Parliament he should have done.

This measure is, in many senses, a panic response by the Labour party, which knows that it is challenged in Scotland by the Scottish National party. That is why it has introduced this measure in the way that it has and why it enjoys the support of the SNP.

There is huge potential for conflict in the White Paper. It states:

> "The Government believe that, given an open and constructive relationship between the UK Government and the Scottish Executive, problems will usually be resolved quickly and amicably."

I hope that that is right, but I suspect that it is simply pious optimism.

The Scots should be aware that if they pass a law in the Scottish Parliament, it will not receive Royal Assent until it has come to this House, which will determine its vires. The White Paper says:

> "there will be a short delay period to ensure that the UK Government is content as to vires."

The UK Government will say to the Scottish Parliament, "I am sorry, but we do not regard that law as being within your power." That is what will happen under the White Paper. If there is a dispute, it will go to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. It is a serious recipe for endless conflicts with a Scottish Parliament anxious to flex its muscles and to arrogate to itself powers that this House will not concede to it. There will be endless rows and endless lawyers' fees.

The biggest flaw in the proposals is that they will lead to conflict. They will raise false expectations in Scotland about the manner in which the Scots will be able to enjoy a degree of devolution—which no one doubts they want. The result will be that not only will there be angst and disappointment in Scotland but, as many of my hon. Friends have said, once the English realise what is going

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on, they will rise up and revolt and the Government will be responsible for a process that will lead to the disintegration of the United Kingdom.

9.27 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge–Brownhills): In the two minutes available to me, I shall try to reduce an argument to a telegram.

I congratulate the Secretary of State. There could not have been a more persuasive advocate for a cause which, on reflection, could lead to the unbundling of the United Kingdom. I say that with diffidence, because the passions and the arguments fairly represented here, one way or the other, emphasise the unequalness of the construction of the constitutional changes. They are not consistent between Scotland and Wales. We cannot stand back and see an architecture disappear that reaffirms the one central passion that was most eloquently expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day).

The denigration of the Union or the minimalisation of it is in part a reflection of something that the people showed they wanted on 1 May. They wanted to end Conservative government. They wanted a Labour Government. In the euphoria and excitement of a new Government, looking at the detail of the proposals is somewhat difficult. The secessionist party and some members of the Labour party have treated with contempt the, in their view, impertinence of Conservative Members, albeit born in Scotland, intervening in what is perceived to be and accepted in Scotland as a done deal.

Let us remember the White Paper's history. There has been no debate in Parliament before its publication, and no weighing-up of the arguments and passions felt by Unionists. There are passionate Unionists in Scotland, too, and the way in which some hon. Members trivialise the debate and fail to recognise that fact does an injustice to Scotland.

Why are some of us passionate? Our Union was built by Scots, by Welsh and by English, and its curious feature is that England is the great melting pot. In truth, which one of us can claim that we do not have Scottish, Welsh or Irish blood within us? That is the essence of the Parliament of the United Kingdom—which is the union of two Parliaments, those of Scotland and of England. Those aspects must be weighed in the debate, but they have not been.

Why am I passionate? In the 290 years of our Union, we have marched from an oligarchical form of government to one of the highest forms of democracy on earth. We have seen the progress of our people, and we have been free people. As one united British people, our liberty and our social conditions have advanced. Unfortunately, the lack of balance in the constitutional proposals setting aside the English dimension—which is a part of the British dimension—means that the proposals cannot be enduring. If the House believes in the Union, it must do one thing: try to reach out to construct a politically balanced system, which reflects those elements.

Sir Robert Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shepherd: No, I cannot; I have met my time limit. The hon. Gentleman will have to forgive me.

9.30 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): If I have one sadness about today's debate on a major constitutional issue, it is about how poorly attended it has been. I am especially surprised at the poor attendance by Government Back Benchers representing Scottish constituencies, and perhaps even more surprised by the non-attendance of those to whom I am not allowed to refer—who sit above the Chamber, were such a place to exist.

I am sorry that the Secretary of State was not able to be in the Chamber for more of the debate, because it has been interesting. It also contained several themes that will be rehearsed in the coming referendum campaign, including the Secretary of State's own theme of the need, or otherwise, to modernise the constitution; the effect on the Union as a whole; and the cost and effectiveness of the proposed arrangements. I passionately believe that, of those three themes, the effect on the Union is undoubtedly the most important.

The essential question about the Union was asked very powerfully in speeches by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day), and in a far too short speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). We cannot effect changes on parts of the United Kingdom without effecting changes on the whole of the United Kingdom. If the situation changes in Scotland, it will change in the whole of the United Kingdom—a fact that lies at the heart of what has been called the West Lothian question. We are unleashing a process of change, of which the White Paper's proposals—for which hon. Members had varying degrees of affection—are only the beginning.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said—as my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills has just said—that the biggest flaw in the devolution proposals is that they cannot be enduring. The hon. Gentleman said that a Scottish Parliament would not last 10 years, which cannot be a good recipe for constitutional change. A week ago, the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) said that the proposals offered the possibility of a "dynamic relationship" between a Scottish Parliament and Westminster, but they are a recipe for instability. Proposals that the hon. Member for Linlithgow called a Pandora's box are a guarantee of friction within the United Kingdom and not—as Ministers have tried to convince us in the past week—a blueprint for stability.

Mr. Dalyell: What I said was that, in 10 years' time, the Parliament could not exist in anything approaching the form in which it is proposed.

Dr. Fox: The hon. Gentleman makes the point more eloquently than I could, and very effectively. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills said, it is of course the very reason why the Scottish nationalists are so much in favour of the proposals, but I shall come to that in a moment.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) said at the outset that one of the things that can easily be predicted about the Scottish Parliament is that it will blame Westminster for whatever goes wrong. It will blame Westminster for any policy failures, whether in education or in health. It will certainly not blame itself. It will blame Westminster whenever it is short of money—I have never known any wing of government not to blame the parent government if it is short of finance.

When the Scottish Parliament cannot fulfil the unrealistic expectations that have been raised in the devolution debate, it will blame Westminster. Therein lies the root of the conflict which we will endure, as the former Foreign Secretary said, for a generation and beyond.

What are we to make of the Secretary of State when he tells people on one side of the argument that they should support the White Paper and vote yes in the referendum because it is a way of preserving the Union and the integrity of the United Kingdom, while at the same time he tells the nationalists, with a nod and a wink, that if they vote yes, they may eventually get their way, which they see as an independent Scotland? Mention was made of riding two horses. It is not possible for one White Paper to be a guarantee of the Union and a stepping stone to independence—it has to be one or the other.

Mr. Flynn *rose—*

Dr. Fox: No, I shall not give way.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), who is no longer in her place, said, "But Germany did not break up"—

Mr. Flynn: Exactly.

Dr. Fox: The hon. Gentleman says, "Exactly." However, there is logic in the status quo, there is logic in arguing for a federal system or for independence, but there is no logic in arguing for this proposal, which does one thing to one part of the United Kingdom and something different in another. The parts are not equally weighted, and the votes are not equally weighted for that reason.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) made it clear that the Scottish nationalists will seek to use a Scottish Parliament as a stepping stone to an independent Scotland. I would have been surprised had he said anything else. He, like the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) and others, was absolutely right to say that independence is a matter for Scotland. Should the Scots decide to be independent, that would, as an issue of self-determination, be a matter for them, but devolution within the United Kingdom is rightly a matter for Westminster and a sovereign United Kingdom Parliament. The Secretary of State agrees with that, but the White Paper is a recipe for conflict within the United Kingdom.

Lord Steel said that the White Paper was a stepping stone towards a federal United Kingdom—it cannot be stable and changing. Only the Government seem to believe that the Scottish Parliament will be satisfied with its political and financial lot. We profoundly disagree with that analysis, and believe that the proposals are a recipe for instability.

In his opening remarks, the Secretary of State spoke about modernising the constitution of the United Kingdom and bringing institutions back in touch with the people. We all accept that politicians have reached an all-time low in the eyes of the public. I understand that, according to recent surveys, only traffic wardens are held in lower esteem than politicians—it frightens me to think that estate agents and solicitors are higher up the table than we are.

Let us consider the details of what the Secretary of State said. He talked about the role of Scottish Members of Parliament, but to whom will Scottish voters go when they have a problem with the health service or schools? Will they go to their Member of the Scottish Parliament? That would seem logical, so what is the role of the redundant Scottish Members of Parliament? If they do not accept the dual mandate—the logical position—and simply continue to sit in the United Kingdom Parliament, they are effectively saying that health, education and other welfare issues on which they fought the general election are not the most important issues to them, but that they want to talk about the remaining issues.

That says a great deal about the approach taken by some Labour Members. It will be interesting to see which ones decide to stand for the Scottish Parliament and continue to sit as Members of this House. Labour's remaining Westminster Members who are not Members of the Scottish Parliament will be only appendages. They will have no locus for affairs in their constituencies. They will be sidelined.

What will happen to the pay of Members of Parliament who continue to sit here, but do not handle all the issues of their constituents? When Ministers take office, they are deemed to be spending less time with their constituents. Parliament already has a precedent of reducing ministerial salaries. It will be interesting to see what the House decides to do.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: I am sorry, but I really do not have time, much as I would love to give way.

We did not hear much about the role of the civil service. We know that it will be imposed on the Scottish Parliament as part of the home civil service. Can the Scottish Parliament reform it? What if it does not suit the Parliament's needs? Can the Scottish Parliament change it, cut it or increase it? What will be the consequence for the jobs of the current Scottish Office civil servants? The Secretary of State did not answer the question asked by the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy), who said that the logic of the White Paper meant an ever-diminishing role for the Secretary of State.

I do not want him to think that I raise this issue out of affection for him. I raise it out of affection for the role of the Secretary of State. He will become a political eunuch, sitting in a Cabinet with no influence on what is happening in Scotland. At best, when there are Parliaments of the same colour in Edinburgh and Westminster, he will be a messenger boy. When there are Parliaments of different colours in the two cities, he will be a whipping boy.

The Secretary of State talked about removing the democratic deficit. He gave a slightly ungracious response to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve). We go back to the old question: how can we be removing a democratic deficit if Scottish Members are able to vote on English issues, but not vice versa? That introduces a democratic deficit. There is worse. If, as the White Paper says, Scottish Ministers will be able to speak for the United Kingdom in Europe, what will be the mechanism of accountability to the House of Commons of the United Kingdom? We need answers to those questions, because the Government are not removing a deficit, but introducing a new one.

Within minutes of the Secretary of State's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) asked what

[Dr. Fox]

would happen if the Scottish Parliament chose to implement European regulations from which the United Kingdom had sought derogation. That is a recipe for turning one part of the UK against another. What if farmers in Northern Ireland were able to accept a deal from Europe, when the United Kingdom Government were trying to negotiate a deal for the whole United Kingdom? The proposals are a recipe for instability, which we must try to stop as best we can.

Mr. Swinney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: I am sorry, but I am very short of time.

The great fraud in the White Paper is tax. I am sure that the Secretary of State will correct me if I am wrong, but we got the distinct impression that income tax is not the only lever of the tax-varying powers to be made available to the Scottish Parliament. If the starting point for taxation were raised to £6,000, 3.8 per cent. on the standard rate would be needed to make up the £450 million guaranteed in the White Paper. How will the shortfall be made up if a 3p increase does not make the full £450 million?

The Secretary of State called on us to be more creative in our thinking, saying that other taxes may not be involved—there may be variations in income tax. That must mean raising higher rates or widening the band. In the latter case, a Chancellor of the Exchequer in this House of Commons taking the low-paid out of tax could face the perverse situation of a Scottish Parliament putting them back into tax, so that it could continue to raise £450 million. That is surely not what the Government intend. I urge them, even at this late stage, to think again.

The Secretary of State let the cat out of the bag. In an intervention on my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes, he said that, if Westminster could raise taxes, perhaps we should abolish Westminster. That is exactly our point. This is a sovereign Parliament. We do not want the tax-raising powers of a Scottish Parliament equated with the tax-raising powers of this Parliament.

I was sorry that the Secretary of State missed the speech of his hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East. That was real Labour. It is a long time since we have heard that in the House. He even said the S word—socialist. I am sure that his bleeper was going off at that minute.

Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I believe that the views of business are important, and I do not believe that, as he claimed, big business is vicious, reactionary and deeply undemocratic. If those in the business community are disconcerted by the tax-raising powers, they may relocate and they may lay off people. That will have an impact on the prosperity of the Scottish people, and that is an important point for us to take into account in the debate.

We have already been cheated of debate on this topic by an arrogant Government. The Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill was guillotined when we wished to discuss issues in more detail. The White Paper will set up a Scottish Parliament dominated by the central belt and it will provide jobs for the boys at public expense. The Scots will pay through the nose simply for being Scottish. The proposals are essentially dishonest. The second question is fraudulent, because the Scots will face a tax-raising Parliament whether or not they vote no to the second question. The proposals are a confidence trick with a large price tag, and above all, they are a threat to the Union.

The most telling moment in the debate—

Mr. Dewar: Idiot.

Dr. Fox: The Secretary of State need not shout, "Idiot." When he resorts to childish name-calling, it makes us think that we are starting to score some points. If he had had the courtesy to the House today to be in for more than about an hour of the debate, he might have heard some of the arguments in more detail. He might have heard the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, who had the courtesy to stay for the debate. When he was asked whether he believed that the Scottish Parliament, as proposed in the White Paper, would be a useful vehicle on his road to independence, he said yes.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Dr. Fox: That is the reality that the Government must come to grips with. The White Paper is not a blueprint for stability. The nationalists believe that it is a route to independence, and for once, we believe that they are right. We must reject the proposals while we can.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) refused to give way to me. I gave way to him in my speech. He should have the courtesy to allow me to say what was on the record before he tries to paraphrase my answer.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

9.46 pm

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office (Mr. Henry McLeish): I shall try, in the 14 minutes left to me, to address some of the issues raised.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) talked about speaking on behalf of the business community. I issue a challenge to Conservative Front-Bench Members. I want them to meet the Scottish Chambers of Commerce; we have done that. I want them to meet the Confederation of British Industry in Scotland; we have done that. I want them to meet the Institute of Directors in Scotland; we have done that. I could go on and on.

Conservative Members have not yet embraced the fact that there are Scottish business organisations that want to contribute to the debate. Alas, their comments are distorted in the House by the Opposition or, even worse, Conservative Members give the impression that they are speaking for the business community. Quite honestly, nothing could be further from the truth.

Today is an important day. We are discussing the White Paper, which is a significant step forward. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State deserves tremendous praise and credit for what he has introduced. Today is also important because the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill has now been given Royal Assent, so we have an Act on the basis of which the referendum can take place. The other important issue is that we have had discussions in

Parliament. Politicians have had their say and we are now moving on to give the people of Scotland and Wales their say in the referendums.

The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) asked what would happen in Europe if different political complexions were represented at Westminster and in Edinburgh. In view of the position now adopted by the Leader of the Opposition, working out the policy position that is in the best interests of the United Kingdom as a whole is more about information and analysis of the effects of different options than about party political positions. We are taking a reasonable view of all that. Again, the Conservatives would be advised to think rather than merely speak about the White Paper.

The right hon. Member for Devizes crowned his contribution with some very bad prose. The Secretary of State's proposals were described as a dark, cold night. We were then treated to the dawn beyond the cold, dark night after which the right hon. Gentleman told us that it would all end in tears. It was ridiculous to end a speech from the Front Bench by referring to a can of tartan tax worms. It is clear that the thoughts of Michael Forsyth live on. That speech summed up many of the remarks by the Conservative Opposition.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) referred to the Parliament building. I am grateful for her comments on the selection of the design and I shall certainly consider her suggestions. As she rightly said, funding is important, and we shall explore all possible means of funding the Scottish Parliament.

The hon. Lady also asked about the licensing of theatres and cinemas. She will recall that the White Paper said that health and safety matters are to be reserved. I hope that she will recognise that much of the legislation on licensing and theatres concerns health and safety matters. We wish to maintain that consistency and continuity.

The hon. Lady also mentioned the reserved powers relating to gambling. Gambling has always been controlled in a uniform way throughout Great Britain. Indeed, there is no separate primary legislation covering gambling in Scotland. That is sensible, as, for example, it is easy to bet by post or telephone. It is important to retain a United Kingdom market.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised a number of important points, some of which were raised with us directly by the Law Society. In view of the time available this evening, I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that I shall need to consider the points that were raised by the Law Society and respond to them. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend receives a full reply.

My hon. Friend also referred to further transfers by Order in Council. The provision is intended to tidy up issues that may be missed by the legislation. It is important to note that the power will be used only with the agreement of Edinburgh and Westminster. Once again, I should like to respond to my hon. Friend in detail.

Mr. Ancram: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McLeish: No. I must respond to all the points that have been raised.

Mr. Ancram: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. McLeish: No. I am not giving way. *[Interruption.]* It is absolutely vital that I respond. I have been asked for answers throughout the day and I shall not be halted by the continuing silly behaviour of Opposition Front-Bench Members.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow also asked why the appointment of the top two judges in Scotland would be treated differently. We propose no changes to what presently happens, except that the role currently performed by the Secretary of State for Scotland will transfer to the First Minister. The Secretary of State makes recommendations directly to Her Majesty the Queen on all but the top two appointments, on which recommendations will be made by the Prime Minister. We consider that it is sensible to continue with that practice as part of the United Kingdom legal system embracing constituent countries.

Mr. Ancram: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister has said several times that he will write to hon. Members in response to their questions. Is it not the normal practice that such answers are lodged in the Library so that all Members can see them?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for the Minister.

Mr. McLeish: My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow raised a number of sensible, constructive points. He should receive the respect and courtesy that he deserves. However, I am quite happy to provide Opposition Front-Bench Members with copies of my replies.

Mention has been made of service voters. Specific provisions in the referendum legislation will allow service personnel to vote according to their declared residence, which need not be the place to which they are posted. It could be their home town or where they were living before they joined up.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) referred to funding to Scotland relative to other parts of the United Kingdom. In the past 18 years, we heard no complaints from the previous Government about the Barnett formula or the distribution of funds within the United Kingdom. Why should it be so now? Is it merely to coincide with the publication of the White Paper, or, indeed, was it simply an example of the wider issue of trying to use any point of debate to attack the proposals?

In a very witty speech, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) gave the impression that, in another place, some interesting points were made. He missed one, which I am quite happy to bring before the House. The Earl of Onslow referred to

> "what happens on the A9 between Lockerbie and the Border".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 20 July 1997; Vol. 582, c. 253.]

Scottish Members will appreciate the significance of that.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan raised points about reserved powers and mentioned estate agents, abortion and licensing of cinemas. Our proposals are logical. We propose to devolve to the fullest extent possible the distinctive legal system in Scotland, but reserve employment law, health and safety, which including aspects of cinema regulation, the common UK market for goods and services, which of course includes estate agents, and certain health matters, including abortion, which are better dealt with on a Great Britain basis.

[Mr. McLeish]

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) raised two questions concerning access during the referendum, which were reinforced by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan. We plan to run a high-profile absent voters campaign on television and in newspapers that will start on Monday 4 August. We also plan a general reminder-to-vote campaign nearer the referendum using television and radio.

An important point was raised in relation to people with disabilities. I am pleased to announce to the House that, after discussions with groups that represent people with disabilities and with returning officers, I intend to introduce a 50 per cent. grant from the Scottish Office to ensure that polling stations are modified so that we can try to improve access for disabled people. We shall certainly wish to promote as best practice as we can.

The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) asked why we should not be removing Scottish Members of Parliament sooner. Primary legislation is required to remove the requirement for a minimum of 71 Members of Parliament. The Boundary Commission will of course consider matters on the normal cycle of eight to 12 years from the last review. That is logical and coherent. It is a matter for the Boundary Commission to attend to after the House deals with the problem.

Mr. Forth: Rubbish.

Mr. McLeish: Despite the curious comments from the Opposition Benches, I shall try to deal with the issues.

As well as making some other excellent comments, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman) raised the question of architectural competition. We envisage an expert panel as part of the process, which will include representatives of varied interests in Scotland. The panel will recommend a shortlist of two to three options from which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can choose. We are currently looking for options for a Parliament in Edinburgh. We do not consider Holyrood palace a serious option. We want a Parliament that is fit for a new millennium and an enduring Parliament to ensure that public access is combined with excellent debate which leads to high-quality legislation.

The hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Morgan) raised issues about anomalies in functions. We believe that the White Paper sets out clearly the matters that we propose should be reserved, at paragraph 3.3, and the reasons why, at paragraph 3.2. The hon. Gentleman picked out certain matters and claimed that they are anomalies. He should recognise the overall structure and logic of what we have proposed. Having dealt with some of the issues that have been raised in the debate, I of course intend to write letters of clarification to hon. Members on any outstanding matters, informing them of detail.

Part of the general thrust of the Conservative opposition could be summed up in very few words. A party in turmoil should not try to undermine a White Paper. It should try to understand it first so that it can contribute a little better to the proposals. A party in retreat should not become an English national party. I suggest that the Conservatives on the Opposition Benches should appreciate that, in Scotland there is a healthy debate with the Conservative party, to which they are contributing absolutely nothing.

The important point is that the comments tonight from many Conservative Members will not protect the Union; they will threaten the Union. The logic of the Conservatives' position is difficult to understand. If one is so far out of touch, having any impact on reality becomes a strange occurrence.

The Conservative party simply will not learn. After 1 May, the White Paper and the referendum proposals, it is in a very vulnerable position. It has no Members in Wales or Scotland. The people of Scotland must now get to grips with the issues. Conservative Members have had a problem discussing the position of the Secretary of State for Scotland, because their attitude is fraudulent. They have already abolished the Shadow Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland, and the contempt that they have shown in opposition would continue into government.

On 11 September, the Scottish people will have a chance to vote. Parliamentarians in Parliament have had a chance to discuss—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That Sir Paul Beresford, Mr. Keith Darvill, Mr. David Drew, Mr. Clive Efford, Lorna Fitzsimons, Mr. Barry Gardiner, Mr. Damian Green, Mr. Eric Illsley, Chris McCafferty, Mr. Piers Merchant, Helen Southworth, Mr. Paul Stinchcombe, Mr. Andrew Stunnell, Mr. Paul Tyler and Mr. Nicholas Winterton be members of the Procedure Committee.—*[Mr. McFall.]*

PETITION

Tolls

10 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I wish to present a petition that has been organised by SKAT—

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Hear, hear.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying to address the House.

Mr. Kennedy: That is the first time that I have been heckled while presenting a petition, but there is a first time for everything.

Mrs. Ewing: It was supportive heckling.

Mr. Kennedy: Yes, it was.

SKAT stands for Skye and Kyle against Tolls. The organisation has generated a considerable response of several thousand signatures in recent weeks.

The petition reads:

To the House of Commons.

The petition of users of the Skye toll bridge declares that they wish the government to honour their Highlands and Islands pledge to abolish the tolls.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Scotland—

who is, fortuitously, in his place tonight—

to make good that pledge.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

It is my pleasure to present the petition on behalf of SKAT and in its support.

To lie upon the Table.

Engineering Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McFall.]*

10.2 pm

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): I am grateful for the opportunity of this Adjournment debate to make my maiden speech on the last day of this part-Session of this most memorable and historic Parliament. I am proud to be the first Labour Member to represent the constituency of Crosby. Boundary changes have meant that I have two predecessors, and it gives me genuine pleasure to pay tribute to both of them. I inherited the wards of Seaforth and Waterloo from my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Mr. Benton). His concern and diligence are legendary in Bootle, and I hope that I can follow in his footsteps and uphold his standards. He is a lovely man and very kind to his constituents.

My other predecessor was Sir Malcolm Thornton, who served in Parliament from 1983 to 1997. Sir Malcolm contributed much to the local community during that time, and he will perhaps be best remembered in the House for his commitment to education and employment. Those are also my passions. I thank him, on behalf of the people of my constituency, for his service, and personally for his magnanimity and charm in defeat.

My wonderful constituency lies between Liverpool and Southport. It is a constituency of great contrasts, including as it does the heart of the Liverpool docklands, where generations of local people have earned their livings. It also includes the residential area of Waterloo—not the scene of Nelson's great victory in 1815 but the scene of the Labour party's great victory in 1997. We then reach Crosby, which is thought to have been established in about 900 AD by Norsemen. The people of Crosby are rightly proud of their ancestry and their community.

Moving further north, we find a pearl on the north-west coast—Formby. It is a place of great beauty, a habitat of wildlife such as red squirrel, beautiful pine forests and the natterjack toad. Formby, too, has a proud history involving the sea, and has provided generations of sailors who served this country with pride. It is said that the first potatoes grown in this country were harvested in Formby, brought there by Sir Walter Raleigh himself. I commend Formby as a place to visit. A stroll through the pine forests cannot fail to refresh and inspire.

I shall now deal with a subject which, as the House will come to know, is my personal passion—engineering. I am a member of a group of people who have traditionally been seriously under-represented in the House and under-rated outside it. I am talking not about women, the disadvantaged or the disabled but about a group of people who have done more to improve and sustain our quality of life than any other group in the world. It is a group of people without whom life as we know it today would simply not exist. We would still be living in caves. In short, I am speaking about engineers and the wonderful, diverse, challenging, rewarding activity of engineering.

I am a chartered engineer, and at the last count there were just seven of us in the House, representing just 1 per cent. of hon. Members. In the German Bundestag, the figure is about 6 per cent. and in the French National Assembly it is about 5 per cent. I intend frequently to speak about engineering during my time in Westminster,

[Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas]

not because I am riding a personal hobby horse but because I believe that engineers are vital to the well-being of our nation and because it is in the national interest to ensure that the engineering community is vigorous, healthy and respected.

Engineers are responsible for just about every aspect that makes life worth living. The food we eat, the water we drink and the clothes we wear are all brought to us by engineers. The cars, trains, boats and planes that we travel on are products of engineering, as are the roads, rails, waterways and runways that carry them. The hospitals where we are cared for and the equipment used in them are designed and built by engineers. The communications revolution is theirs; it is also ours.

Engineering is probably the most innovative and exciting profession. Indeed, it reaches parts that other professions could never hope to reach. If invaders from Mars—I expect them very shortly—wanted to disable and conquer our wonderful planet, engineers would be their most sensible and prime target. This country has a national genius for engineering, and some of the finest work in the world is done here. British people record more patents than any other nationality in the world. We continue to do so in the face of adversity that has plagued my industry for the past 20 years.

Engineers are highly successful in both career and salary terms. An engineer has a better chance of becoming a chief executive than a person from any other profession, a better chance of becoming a university vice-chancellor than someone from any other discipline, and a better chance of enjoying his or her job than any other worker. I lost a lot of money coming to this place, but I would not change my decision because I came here to make people more aware of what my profession can offer society. That fact makes it all the stranger that engineering is not a career choice for most of the nation's youth.

I arrived in engineering by accident. I emerged in a wonderful dockland environment, working on huge machines where there was a thump, thump, thump and a grind, grind, grind, but at the end of the day we had produced beautiful things of which we, and the nation, could be proud. The result of the lack of youth involvement is that the profession is not getting its fair share of the nation's top quality young people. As in some other areas, this is especially so for women.

Women mechanical engineers represent only 3 per cent. of the total number of people in our profession. It makes it very lonely. It also makes it very difficult for other women to follow. We cannot deny the contribution that 50 per cent. of the population could make. By not involving women in industry, we lose the chance of doing better, and our nation always deserves to do better. I firmly believe that, although we have the lead in some matters now, that lead could be even greater with the greater involvement from the female population.

We are clearly not lighting the spark of interest in the young. That is a matter that the engineering community must address. It is surely a matter that the Government should address as a matter of urgency. Why? Because, as far as our well-being as a nation is concerned, engineering is an industry that must deliver. It must deliver because of the financial contribution that engineering makes.

It is often said by Government Departments, among others, that engineering accounts for 5 per cent. of gross domestic product in this country. It is a figure that annoys me intensely, because it is based on a deeply flawed definition of what is and what is not an engineering company. Official statistics relating to the engineering sector tend to include only the manufacturing industry, but that is nonsense.

What about construction, petrochemicals and the service industries? Almost all the companies operating in those sectors are engineering-led and dominated. They employ huge numbers of professional engineers, technical engineers, and semi- skilled and skilled workers. They should all be considered when calculating engineering's contribution to GDP. If they were, the true figure would rocket to 40 per cent., so it is easy to understand why we need a world-class engineering base in the United Kingdom to remain competitive. It is easy to understand why we became less competitive in the 1980s, when that figure was not appreciated.

The Labour Government talk a lot about education, health, the environment and other issues which we consider crucial to the nation, and rightly so, but without engineers and engineering, the necessary wealth to pay for all these areas of need would not be created. United Kingdom engineering employs more than 1.7 million people. I feel very proud to represent them this evening. I hope that the House can see them all, because they stand with me now as I speak. I carry their hopes and ambitions, and it is not my intention to let them down or divorce them at any point. They have sustained me and given me great pleasure, and will continue to do so.

UK engineering earned £75 billion in exports in 1995. It contributed in the region of £10 billion in corporation tax. Engineering underpins our whole economy. That is one dimension that distinguishes engineering from science. This is a pithy issue for the House, where engineering is considered to be embraced by science.

Engineering is not science. I am not a scientist. I am an engineer, and so are 1.7 million other people who chose to go into engineering because it is not science. Science is the process of discovering nature and its laws. Without scientists, where would we be? However, engineering is about using those laws to make things. We articulate design. Our job is to take concepts and dreams and make them into reality. In so doing, we make money and create jobs. That is the purpose of engineering. That is what we do very well. We work hand in hand with scientists, but we are mutually exclusive, except on a very narrow boundary.

There is clearly an important link between the two disciplines, but an equally important distinction. Science is a net consumer of national wealth. Some of my colleagues may argue with that. By comparison, engineering is a net generator of wealth. So why do the Government have a chief scientific adviser and not a chief engineering adviser? Perhaps the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry will assure me that he will consider making such an appointment as soon as practicable.

Of course, much of the responsibility for promoting engineering must remain on the shoulders of the engineering community itself, but what can we in the House and in the Government do to help? There is quite a lot that we can do. We need to recognise the contribution that engineers make to the national well-being, and publicly demonstrate our commitment to it.

We need to make positive reference to engineering at every opportunity, publicly encouraging our young people to make it a career choice. In other words, we have a responsibility to talk it up. Talking up engineering means more money for the nation. More money makes us a stronger economy and we need to be a stronger economy on a world platform. We need to allocate parliamentary time to debate engineering matters. Having recently been appointed to the Select Committee on Science and Technology, I hope that engineering will feature strongly in that Committee. We need to allocate Government resources to promoting engineering, and I commend the Government for the initiatives that they are taking. I shall refer to the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts later.

We need to create an education system which better meets the needs of industry. That is clearly a fact and many statistics are available to prove it. We need to listen to the engineering community when formulating policy because many people in the engineering community are desperate to be heard. If we silence them, we lose advantage. We must encourage them to join us. We lose nothing and stand a chance of gaining many things.

Engineering impacts not only on every aspect of our daily life but on every aspect of our political life. Ministers in all Departments should think about engineering when formulating policy. It is quite a clarion call, but it would be a call well worth listening to.

In short, we must give some positive leadership in an area so fundamental to our well-being. We can give a signal to the rest of the country that we believe that engineering is vital. We have kept the profession in the dark for too long. This would surely go a long way to raising the status of UK engineering and persuade the brightest and best of our young people that as a career it is not only exciting and remunerative but highly valued by our peers and the wider public.

On 1 January 1996, an important event took place which historians will look back on as a watershed in engineering history. On that date, our 39 engineering institutions—by the way, I belong to the best, the Institution of Mechanical Engineers—having gone their own different ways for more than 150 years, agreed to bury the hatchet. That was vital, because the various engineering institutions had their own vested interests and failed to come together to lobby Government effectively.

Those institutions decided that it was time to lobby Government effectively after being totally ignored by the Conservative Government for the last 17 years to the detriment of our industry. They formed a partnership with the Engineering Council. The Government subsequently recognised that new beginning by signing a memorandum of understanding with the Engineering Council, the profession's lead body which sets out formally the respective responsibilities of Government and the council in promoting engineering as a profession.

That is an important beginning but should not be seen as an end. There are 1.5 million engineers out there just pleading for the Government to demonstrate that they think that engineering is important. They appreciate—I appreciate—how much they contribute, but it is demoralising that our nation's leaders have seemed unable to find the words to say so. We are fed up with being pilloried. Perhaps if we in the House can pay engineers more than lip service, an arts-graduate-dominated media might follow suit.

I also find it odd that, as the law stands, anyone can call himself an engineer. That is a sad fact. People are prohibited by law from calling themselves a medical practitioner, a lawyer or even a gas fitter unless they are qualified and licensed to practise. The reasons for that are obvious. There are serious safety and ethical ramifications in failing to do those jobs properly.

But consider the anomaly. Someone can legally build a bridge, design an aircraft or put the Jubilee line right underneath the House and jeopardise Madam Speaker's sleeping arrangements without the need for any licensing. Imagine the potential disaster inherent in any of those operations. The majority of problems facing our environment can be solved only by engineers. We talk about sustainable development. Engineering is associated with being the generator of pollutants, but it will also be the solution. We must seek to consult the engineering profession if we are to manage our future more efficiently.

We need to seek the contribution of the profession in a more pro-active way, and I can suggest a forum for doing so. We now have a national register of qualified and competent engineers maintained by the Engineering Council, but it does not have any legal status as yet. It does not encourage the industry to demand that engineers and employers be on the register. If employers do not demand registration, engineers do not always aspire to it.

The Government could correct the anomaly at a stroke by affording the register the same legal status as that held by other professions. I hope that the representatives from my profession can articulate an argument that the Government will find acceptable and that they will introduce the register. That is significant for our nation, and it would afford us a greater status on a world platform. We must allow our engineers to move more freely in a competitive world market.

We are not absolutely criticising the previous Government. There is almost a complete damning, but not quite. The previous Government's "Action For Engineering" initiative was a short burst of hope and was welcomed. Unfortunately, it died a quick death after two years. I urge the present Government to do more and to throw their weight behind the imaginative promotional campaigns emanating from the engineering community.

I refer the House to the YES campaign—the Year of Engineering Success. It is managed by Mary Harris, a wonderful engineer who has done a stalwart job. Unfortunately, the money provided for her lasts for only a year. I ask the Government to consider allowing the YES initiative to come under NESTA—the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts.

I urge the Government and the House to fix their attention on engineering. Certainly it is the goose that lays the golden egg for all developed nations, and the sooner we accept that and develop policies to match it, the sooner we will be able to draw the full benefit for our national well-being. I am proud to be an engineer and I understand the contribution that engineering makes to this nation. I commend our profession to the House, and I hope it will receive its sympathy, understanding and support.

10.21 pm

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis–Thomas) on her initiative in raising this subject. We are at the end of this part of the Session and have only a few minutes before the House rises, but that was an excellent maiden speech and I am sad that it cannot lead to a wider debate. I welcome her as a chartered engineer—I think she is the first female chartered engineer to enter the House. She has a long and informed interest in engineering, and I believe that she is a member of the Engineering Council's senate. Her contribution will be valuable and I am confident that she will keep raising the issue of engineering. She brings a clear and articulate passion to the subject.

I am reminded of the first time the word "engineer" was used in the English language. In 1592, Harvey referred to someone who was

> "That dreadful engineer of phrases instead of thunderbolts."

My hon. Friend's speech tonight and her skilled, creative and persuasive use of language will carry engineers positively into the future. She is an engineer of phrases and thunderbolts, and I look forward to her contributions in the House.

We recognise the importance of engineers and engineering to the modern British economy and the enormous contribution that engineers make throughout every sector—primary as well as secondary industries, and services. Even the most narrowly defined engineering sector—metal products, mechanical equipment, electronics and instrumentation, electrical equipment, motor vehicles and other transport equipment—accounts for 8 per cent. of the UK's gross domestic product. Engineering sales totalled more than £164 million in 1996.

In other words, it is a massively significant sector. We must recognise that engineers and engineering have a vital contribution to make to our national well-being as well as in a purely economic way. We want to support the Year of Engineering Success as positively and practically as we can.

This year, the national health service will celebrate its 50th anniversary. It is worth reflecting on the vital role that engineers have played in health care, and indeed transport, during that time. We shall also be celebrating the role of science, engineering and technology. I like to keep those three words separate and distinct, rather than just speaking of "science". We shall be celebrating "SET for life" week, and we hope that engineering will have a high profile in that event.

It is through the ingenuity of engineers that our manufacturing industries will develop processes and products that will not only raise the standard of living but give us all a more environmentally friendly future. Better manufacturing processes can help to minimise the environmental impact of products during manufacturing. We are talking about processes as well as products. I was interested by what my hon. Friend said about the quality of life in her constituency. It should be emphasised that engineering industries will be the industries of the future, helping us to clean up the environment and live on a better planet in the coming century.

Engineering is often denigrated. My constituency is based on engineering—my family has an engineering background—but, even there, engineers are always seen as oily-handed sons of toil. I stress the word "sons": they are not daughters. Engineers are seen as semi-skilled, or as people using manual skills. We must not continue to be locked into that "smokestack", "furnace", industrial vision of the past; we must transform it, and see engineering as the industry of the future.

I was impressed by the language used by my hon. Friend, which suggested that engineering could be creative and, dare I say, artistic. At one point, she used the word "beauty" to describe engineered products and engineering processes. We ought to encourage the brightest and best of young people, particularly young women, to take up engineering at schools, colleges and universities, and to enter the profession. I hope that YES will pay attention to that. Perceptions need to be changed, and YES is a small step along the road. I believe that discussions are already under way between the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Engineering Council with a view to increasing the engineering community's contribution to SET week in 1998.

In Japan and Germany, a thorough understanding of technology is considered vital in top management. As my hon. Friend pointed out, there is a higher percentage of engineering graduates in France than in Britain. We must take engineering more seriously, in both industry and academia.

As was pointed out at Question Time today, although women constitute only 13 per cent. of those who study engineering at university, they also constitute 15 per cent. of graduates. In other words, women on engineering courses have a higher success rate than men. We ought to encourage the brightest and the best to see engineering as their future career, because we in Britain have developed engineering skills that are second to none. I hope that those skills can be enhanced in the new century, but we have more work to do. I hope that the development unit for women in science, engineering and technology, which is part of the Department of Trade and Industry, will try to raise the profile of engineering among young women, and will encourage them to take up the subject and build our future.

I appreciate that engineers are not required by law to register. As my hon. Friend may know, the Engineering Council has for some time been considering the pros and cons of mandatory registration, but no formal case has yet been put to the Government. Such a case would, of course, require the unequivocal support of employers, but I promise that, if that support were given, we would consider it seriously.

The Government's chief scientific adviser, who works in the DTI, is a scientist; his predecessor, Sir John Fairclough, was an eminent engineer. I take my hon. Friend's point that science, engineering and technology must be kept distinct. I hope that my hon. Friend will not be offended if I quote the words of a poet. In 1781, William Cowper said of another person:

> "Unless we engineered him with question after question we could get absolutely nothing out of him."

I hope that my hon. Friend will engineer Ministers in her Government with question after question so that they echo outside the House and result in engineering being taken much more seriously than in the recent past. Long ago, it was taken very seriously.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): I, too, also congratulate the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis–Thomas) on the style and charm of her maiden speech and on her passionate defence of engineering. The subject is under-represented in the House and the hon. Lady went a long way towards redressing the balance. We look forward to hearing from her again.

Does the Minister agree with Sir Brian Moffat, one of our leading industrialists and engineers, that sterling is now ludicrously overvalued, that engineering will not be enhanced and that there is no sense in further successive interest rises which simply feed the import boom and fuel the high street sales bonanza?

Mr. Battle: The hon. Gentleman's intervention is unusual in an Adjournment debate in that it has broadened the debate, and I have only minutes to reply to his question.

Everyone is concerned to see that the economy does not adversely affect manufacturing—we shall debate that matter elsewhere. I have met representatives of the Royal Academy of Engineering, and I hope in due course to meet the senate of the Engineering Council. It is not my job to spend all my time in a glass box in the Department in Victoria street; my job is to get out as often as possible to meet engineers. In the words of my hon. Friend, I intend to listen and learn from them so that their thoughts and expertise may be injected into our political and parliamentary activities.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock till Monday 27 October, pursuant to Resolution [28 July].

House of Commons

Monday 27 October 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

WRIT ISSUED DURING THE ADJOURNMENT

MADAM SPEAKER acquainted the House that she had issued, during the Adjournment, a warrant for a new writ for the borough constituency of Paisley, South in the room of Gordon McMaster, Esquire, deceased.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Community Constables

1. **Mr. Healey:** What plans he has to increase the presence of community constables on the streets; and if he will make a statement. [11655]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): It is for individual chief constables and police authorities to determine the level of police presence on the streets in their area. The Government are working with the police to relieve them of unnecessary bureaucratic burdens, to allow chief constables to put more officers back on the beat. In the crime and disorder Bill, we shall give the police new powers to enable them to deal with street disorder.

Mr. Healey: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, but does he agree that beat bobbies are often a unique source of local intelligence and play a special part in practical, preventive policing? Does he further agree that, although they are very highly valued by the people they serve, they are sometimes not as highly valued by the forces that employ them? What specific steps does he plan to reinforce the role of community police officers?

Mr. Straw: I accept entirely what my hon. Friend says. His point about the value of police officers on the beat was emphasised by the Audit Commission's report last year and, indeed, by evidence from the Police Federation. We are making quite clear to all police authorities and chief constables the emphasis that we place on the importance of community police officers, and in the crime and disorder Bill we shall give police and local authorities greater powers to deal with disorder generally.

Mrs. Laing: Will the Secretary of State join me in expressing the grief and sorrow of the House at the tragic death of young WPC Nina Mackay, who lived in my constituency, and in sending her family the condolences of all hon. Members? Is the Secretary of State aware that the person charged with her murder was, at the time of the murder, out on bail? Given those circumstances, will he order a review of the conditions on which bail is granted by magistrates courts?

Mr. Straw: I will indeed join the hon. Lady, who speaks for the whole House, in expressing our total revulsion at that vile crime against an unarmed WPC, Nina Mackay, who lived in the hon. Lady's constituency, my home town. That makes it all the more poignant for me. Of course I join the hon. Lady in that. The whole country is revolted by this crime against her family and against her whole community.

The hon. Lady asked whether I will look at the availability of bail conditions to magistrates courts. I understand her point, but she will appreciate that, since a number of judicial and semi-judicial inquiries have to take place, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on that until those have been completed; when they are, I shall certainly bear very thoroughly in mind the points that she made.

Mr. Sheerman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we could transform the situation in the community if we made better use of the special constable? Is it not about time that we took special constables seriously, and paid them a proper amount to do the valuable job that they do in helping the community? Will my right hon. Friend note the experiment which has been such a success in my constituency in improving law keeping on the inner-urban estates?

Mr. Straw: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of special constables. I know that his view is shared throughout the House. It is an open question whether paying special constables would increase their number or availability, but of course we keep the matter under review.

Mr. Maginnis: May I, on behalf of my party, associate myself with what has been said about the death of the young police constable? We are fully aware of the dangers that our police face in carrying out their duties.

Is the Home Secretary not placing community constables at a disadvantage by expecting retailers—those who sell on the streets—to police the behaviour of young people, especially in connection with the sale of alcohol and cigarettes? Is it not time that he gave those retailers some statutory authority, for instance, by introducing identity cards, so that the community constable does not find himself at loggerheads with the retailer whom he is policing, unnecessarily and—it often seems to the retailer—unfairly?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the first part of his question No one knows better than someone who represents the north of Ireland the enormous danger in which police officers can be placed daily.

As for the hon. Gentleman's second point, we accept that retailers experience a severe problem when trying to check the ages of people attempting to buy drink or cigarettes. That is one of the reasons why we are supporting the proposals of the Portman Group, which wants "proof of age" cards to be introduced.

Police Constables

3. **Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith:** How many additional police constables were recruited in the year to April 1997. [11659]

Mr. Straw: The number of police constables in England and Wales increased by 460 during 1996–97 to 98,132.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I welcome the fact that the Sussex police have increased recruitment over the past two years. I am grateful to the last Government for that initiative.

Will the Home Secretary ensure that basic pay is increased to an adequate level, so that we can encourage more young people to join the police force—and not just more people, but people of adequate calibre?

Mr. Straw: I am not sure why the right hon. Gentleman is so generous in his gratitude to the last Administration, given that there were 11 fewer police officers in Sussex during the period in question than in the previous year. As for his second point, about pay, we intend to maintain the arrangements for police pay that were introduced following the Edmund-Davies report late in 1979.

Mr. Winnick: Would there not be one more police constable alive today if the court concerned had not granted bail, in opposition to what the police and the Crown Prosecution Service said at the time in giving their reasons why bail should not be granted? Does not the foul and terrible murder of the WPC demonstrate the dangers that some police officers face day in, day out? The House should recognise those dangers, despite the criticisms—often justified—of one or two officers.

Mr. Straw: As I said in answer to the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing), I entirely understand the point that has been made. I hope that the House will appreciate, however, that until various inquiries have been completed—including the inquest—it would be wrong for me to comment on the precise circumstances in which the court came to issue bail.

Mr. Greenway: Does the Home Secretary agree with the police, who estimate that there were 3,000 more constables in post in spring this year than in 1992? Will he confirm to the House his intention to provide the funds for, and go ahead with, the recruitment of a further 2,000 police officers, as the previous Government planned?

Mr. Straw: As the electorate found out, there was a huge difference between what the previous Government planned and what they were able to do. The hon. Gentleman's intervention was as unwise as that of the right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith). The simple truth is that, despite two successive promises to increase the number of police officers by 2,000 during the previous Parliament, the number in post fell by 469. That was the Conservative record.

Primary Purpose Rule

4. **Ms Beverley Hughes:** What progress has been made in implementing changes in the primary purpose rule. [11660]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The primary purpose rule was abolished on 5 June. A review of outstanding appeal cases has now been completed, and those involved should have been informed. Some people will make applications in the light of the change to the rule, and they will be dealt with through the normal procedure.

Ms Hughes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the abolition of the primary purpose rule has removed a discriminatory practice that affected many genuinely married couples, and that its removal has meant a great deal to the people concerned? I congratulate my hon. Friend on the successful completion of the review. I am sure that he will agree that future applications must be dealt with fairly and swiftly. What steps has he taken to ensure that they will be dealt with within a reasonable time?

Mr. O'Brien: A series of steps is in process that should ensure that cases are dealt with quickly. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her support. The primary purpose rule was without a purpose, except to cause misery to many families. The mess that it caused to family life was deplorable. I am pleased that we were able to remove it and thereby show that we support families.

Mr. Hawkins: Does the Minister realise that the abolition of the primary purpose rule and the other changes that the new Government have introduced have led to the problems that he has been trying to explain away on Czech television in the past couple of weeks? Is it not quite clear that the previous Government were absolutely right to have a sensible, firm and fair policy? The minute the new Government took office they started messing about and caused enormous strains on the system through illegal, bogus asylum seekers trying to come to this country. Is that not a recipe for disaster?

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to know the difference between immigration controls and the asylum system. If this change in the primary purpose rule was so bad, why did the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) not pray against it, not seek to have a debate on it and not oppose it? The reason is that it was a fair change. It will ensure that the Government will do what they promised at the general election, which was to maintain firm and fair immigration and asylum controls.

Mr. Lock: Does my hon. Friend agree that the changes that he has made to the immigration laws, although they may not have been accepted by Conservative Members, have been widely accepted by people in the country? Does he further agree that those who have lined up to condemn the changes, whether from the xenophobic or the homophobic tendency, are to be deplored?

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend is right, but he does a disservice to some Conservative Members, such as the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) who was conspicuous in welcoming the changes to the primary purpose rule. However, my hon. Friend is right: it is the same old Tories. At the Tory conference, the Tory leader said that his party would now be more open and tolerant. Within hours of that statement, we made an announcement on same sex couples which brought out rent-a-quotes from people, from Lord Tebbit to the ex-Member of Parliament, Sir Ivan Lawrence. The hard, intolerant, right-wing core of the Tory party is still there: we know it, no matter what the Leader of the Opposition now says.

Police Pensions

5. **Mr. Gray:** What representations he has received on the effect on police pensions of the removal of the advance corporation tax credit for pension funds. [11661]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Alun Michael): It should come as no surprise to the House that we have received no representations on the effect on police pensions of the removal of the advance corporation tax credit. The police pension scheme is not based on a pension fund: it is financed on a pay-as-you-go basis.

Mr. Gray: Is the Minister not aware that, although what he says is of course correct, he has entirely missed the fact that civilian employees in the police force will be affected by the removal of this tax? In Wiltshire alone, the removal of ACT will cost the police force an extra £80,000. That money should be spent on policing Wiltshire's streets rather than being handed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman should read his own question before asking supplementaries. He asked specifically about the effect on police pensions. The distinction that he makes does not apply to some police pensions, especially some in the Metropolitan police.

Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act 1985

6. **Mr. Hanson:** What plans he has to review the operation of and scope of the Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act 1985. [11662]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): Although we remain concerned about that problem, we have no plans to review the operation of the Act at this time.

Mr. Hanson: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to welcome the recent appointment of the drugs tsar, who will help in the overall co-ordination of Government policy on the prevention of substance abuse?

On solvent abuse in particular, which is the topic of the Act, will my hon. Friend ensure that there is greater education and stronger enforcement of the Act? In particular, will he ensure that the dangers of butane gas abuse, which has killed nearly 40 young people this year alone, are brought to the attention of the community at large?

Mr. Howarth: I join my hon. Friend in welcoming the appointment of the new drugs tsar. There is a case for co-ordinating Government policy and I am sure that that is the function that the drugs tsar will carry out.

My hon. Friend asks about solvent and lighter gas abuse. We receive advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, and the Department of Trade and Industry is currently looking at the difficulties of enforcing policy. The Department will involve the council, and if anything positive results we shall certainly be willing to act. The advice that we have received, and that which the previous Government received on two occasions, is that it is difficult to legislate in this area. If anyone can come up with a sensible way to do that, we will obviously look at it.

Closed Circuit Television

7. **Mr. David Atkinson:** What assessment he has made of the use of closed circuit television in combating crime. [11663]

Mr. Michael: The experience of closed circuit television partnerships and recent research has shown that CCTV can be effective in preventing crime and, indeed, the fear of crime when it is used as part of a wider crime prevention strategy. The CCTV schemes which the Home Office has helped to fund are required to provide details of how they plan to evaluate the success of their systems, and we are continuing to monitor these.

Mr. Atkinson: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the dismay of my constituents that a European regulation which is to be implemented next year will prevent the use of video evidence alone, however conclusive, being sufficient for a court to convict? Will he resist such Napoleonic practices from Europe, which can only hinder the Government's ability to be tough on crime?

Mr. Michael: Often, things are blamed on Europe which Europe is not even trying to introduce. I shall certainly look at the hon. Gentleman's point, but I think that he is misinterpreting what is coming from Europe. Certainly, one of the strengths of CCTV is that on a number of occasions it has provided clarity of evidence and has increased the certainty of successful prosecution. We all know that the fear of being caught and punished is the most effective deterrent to crime.

Ms Christine Russell: Does my hon. Friend agree that, although CCTV is no substitute for police officers on the beat, it makes a great contribution to reducing crime, especially street crime and shoplifting in city centres? Would he and his Department be prepared to do more to encourage retailers and city centre businesses to enter into funding partnerships with local authorities so as to extend the provision of CCTV?

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there are benefits from CCTV schemes, particularly when they are part of a response to crime by a partnership involving the public sector and the business sector. The crime and disorder Bill, which we shall introduce later this year, will strengthen and encourage those partnerships and will involve the whole community in the fight against crime. CCTV needs to be a part of that community response where its targeted use is particularly appropriate.

Mr. Clappison: But the Minister is conspicuously not offering anything in the way of new resources. He will remember that, before the recess, he promised a decision on the future of Home Office support for rounds of closed circuit television, and he has done nothing. Is it not time that the Government stopped dithering and showed some commitment to this highly effective weapon in the fight against crime, or will the Government more readily find money to put television sets into prison cells to please prisoners than put cameras on the streets to protect the public?

Mr. Michael: I think that the hon. Gentleman is confusing who was in power when television sets were put into cells. I appreciate the difficulty that he is in: he has taken over a difficult brief, which has been left in an awful mess by Conservative predecessors. For instance, the previous Home Secretary had £15 million to spend in this financial year and he appears to have spent £20 million. We are trying to sort out the mess that we have inherited. It is also clear that, despite the interesting comments by the Conservative party in the run-up to the general election, it had made no provision whatever for CCTV past the coming financial year—so the hon. Gentleman needs to do his homework before coming to this Chamber.

Border Controls

8. **Dr. Ladyman:** If he will make a statement on Britain's border controls with the rest of the European Union. [11664]

Mr. Straw: Our first resolve is to retain the United Kingdom system of frontier and border controls. One of the many achievements of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in Amsterdam in June was to obtain legal confirmation of the right to maintain controls at our frontiers with other European Union member states—something that the previous Administration had conspicuously failed to achieve.

Dr. Ladyman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Will he also confirm that the problems in east Kent are almost entirely a consequence of the previous Administration's failure to put in place fair and effective asylum and immigration controls? I thank him for the efforts he has already made to reduce significantly the number of unfounded asylum seekers. What further measures does he intend to implement to help asylum applications to be dealt with more quickly?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. We have acted swiftly and firmly to seek to stem the flow of unfounded asylum seekers at Dover and elsewhere, against a background in which the previous Government signed up to the Dublin convention, apparently without even reading the text, something that has made the procedure much more complex and much more difficult.

In answer to my hon. Friend's second question, I can announce today the introduction of a new procedure to speed up the decision-making processes in abusive asylum cases. Under the new procedure, the time allowed for people with abusive claims to make further representations after interview will be cut from the existing 28 days to five working days. The new procedure will have national application at all ports with immediate effect.

Mr. Gale: The right hon. Gentleman will have heard his junior Minister confirm on the radio this morning that his civil servants were reviewing entry procedures for people coming into the United Kingdom and passport controls, and that there was therefore some substance in the newspaper story that was carried. Given that the Minister said that this morning, why should we believe for one moment that our frontiers are safe, particularly in the light of the fact that his Department took absolutely no action to stem the first wave of immigrants from the Czech and Slovak Republics until that news hit the press?

Mr. Straw: Almost every assumption behind the hon. Gentleman's question is incorrect. The truth is that we took firm and effective action. That is now working, as the numbers show.

Mr. Prosser: I thank my right hon. Friend for meeting me last week to talk about the serious problems that Dover and my constituents in Dover face. Does he agree that the sudden impact of bogus asylum seekers on a small community such as Dover can have major social impact and disrupt good racial harmony? Would he like to contrast the practical and responsible way in which the Government are working to find solutions to those sensitive problems with the irresponsible and inflammatory statements made by some Conservative Members?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks and for the compliment that he paid to my hon. Friend the junior Minister, who has been working so hard to deal with those problems. The truth is that the previous Government's practice on asylum applications was chaotic. That led to a wholly unsatisfactory burden being placed on local authorities, about which Conservative right hon. and hon. Members used to complain. But that burden is there. The previous Government's inefficiency also led to a backlog of more than 50,000 applications. They created the problem; we are attempting to provide a solution to it.

Mr. Beith: Has not the document that appeared this morning revealed that neither the right hon. Gentleman nor, perhaps more significantly, the previous Conservative Government set aside anything like enough money to provide enough immigration officers to inspect every one of the millions of passports that are shown at our port controls? Does that not demonstrate that the right hon. Gentleman must use more sophisticated systems, particularly given that the current one allows many illegal immigrants through in any case, and seek more European co-operation, not less, to control in particular the flow of criminals across boundaries?

Mr. Straw: One of the reasons why the Liberal Democrats ended up with such a small number of seats after the election and are the third party was their spend, spend, spend policy, which convinced nobody. The right hon. Gentleman spent the one penny on income tax about 55 times over.

Fiona Mactaggart: I invite my right hon. Friend to refute the suggestions made in some newspapers today that Britain is planning to abandon its border controls. May I also ask him to provide further information about the announcement that he has just made about speeding up the processing of abusive asylum claims? What measures will be put in place to ensure that those whose claims are genuine will not be pushed into the fast track and will be able to make full representations on their cases?

Mr. Straw: The procedure according to which we have cut the time from 28 days to five days for port applicants—something which the previous Government never did—is designed for abusive claims. Those who have a genuine, well-founded claim will not be caught by the change.

As for the first part of my hon. Friend's question, the simple fact is that the previous Government failed to secure proper legal protection for our border controls. That is not just our view but the view of the former Conservative Immigration Minister, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle). It was not until my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister went to Amsterdam that any proper legal protection of our border controls was obtained and written into international law.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: First, may I associate the Opposition with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) and those of the Home Secretary on the tragic death of the woman police constable? We join everyone else in extending our condolences to her family.

Given the Government's apparent determination to undermine our border controls and the fair but firm immigration policy which they inherited from the previous Government, can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the terms of reference of the spending review made it legitimate for civil servants to bring forward for the right hon. Gentleman's consideration the sort of proposals outlined in today's edition of *The Guardian*?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks about the appalling death of WPC Nina Mackay.

On the right hon. Gentleman's question, he should do a little more research on his Government's record on border controls. They had no legal basis for their claim about such controls. Moreover, I have discovered that, under the Conservative Administration, they cut the proportion of embarkation controls from 100 per cent. to 60 per cent. of passengers, but never announced that—hardly "firm but fair": unfair and not firm at all.

Asylum Seekers

9. **Mr. Allan:** What plans he has to revise the practice of keeping asylum seekers in prison. [11665]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A review of detention policy, including the use of prisons, is being undertaken. Interested groups have been asked to comment on the principal proposals and the final conclusions will be made known shortly.

Mr. Allan: Is it the Minister's intention to consult Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons on his view of the use of prison and detention centres for asylum seekers? Under the review, is it still intended to minimise the use of prison in line, with the Home Secretary's commitment to the Charter '87 group for refugees?

Mr. O'Brien: The answer to both questions is yes. I have discussed the detention review with Sir David Ramsbotham and asked him to compile some specific reports, including one into the situation at Campsfield, where there were some disturbances a few months ago. I have also asked him for some details of his views on the matter. The objective, as always, is to minimise the use of detention.

Mr. Malins: Many Conservative Members think that the Government are a soft touch for asylum seekers. Will the Minister confirm that it costs more than £500 a week to keep an asylum seeker in detention? How many asylum seekers are currently in detention and what is the total cost to the Exchequer? How long will the taxpayer put up with the fact that the Government appear so soft?

Mr. O'Brien: It sounds very much as though the hon. Gentleman is saying that the Government are a soft touch, which we are not, and then complaining that it costs too much to detain people. We detain the minimum number of people and ensure that we detain only those whom it is necessary to detain because of a fear that they might abscond. We were committed at the general election to maintaining firm immigration controls, we are committed to it today and we shall be committed to it throughout our time in office.

Mr. Linton: Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that the real problem is that his predecessor left a backlog of 76,000 asylum cases that had not been dealt with when the Conservatives lost the general election?

Mr. O'Brien: That is certainly one of the key problems that we face in trying to resolve the difficulties of the asylum system. We have been handicapped not only by the backlog but by the complexities of the Dublin convention, which came into force on 1 September and has made it much more difficult to return asylum seekers to other countries, causing many problems in Dover, for example. We have also inherited the system of having 28 days to deal with manifestly unfounded asylum claims; it is bizarre, but it was the previous Government's rule. We are at a loss to explain why they had it, but they did. They bequeathed us a messy asylum system, and we are intent on cleaning it up, sorting it out and making it work efficiently and effectively.

Crime Prevention

10. **Mr. Amess:** What recent representations he has received on measures taken by his Department in respect of crime prevention. [11666]

Mr. Michael: As of last Friday, 24 October, we had received 114 responses to our consultation document, "Getting to Grips with Crime—a New Framework for Local Action". I am especially pleased at the positive response from both the police and local authorities. A variety of representative and voluntary organisations have responded positively to our invitation to join us in developing proactive strategies to cut crime. We have also had a positive response from many business leaders.

Mr. Amess: Is the Minister aware that policing in Westcliff and Leigh-on-Sea is shortly to be reorganised? Will he join me in congratulating all those involved in trying to improve the quality of people's lives by high-visibility, community-based, intelligence-led policing—all, I understand, at no extra cost to the Exchequer?

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his interest in the policing of Westcliff and Leigh-on-Sea, about which I would not otherwise have been as well informed. About a year ago, it was discovered that 25 per cent. of crime in the division was occurring on one beat in the town centre, and staffing levels were adjusted accordingly, although I understand that there is no reorganisation as such, leading to a cut of 14 per cent. in crime in that division last year. That is a good example of crime being analysed and properly understood—that is right at the heart of our policies—and then being tackled by the police, either alone or in conjunction with local authorities and others.

Mrs. Brinton: Does my hon. Friend agree that urgent measures are needed to combat youth crime, particularly after 18 years of Tory lawlessness and disorder? I should like to draw his attention to the state of siege in Kingsley road in Peterborough, where gangs of teenagers and children as young as 10 daily set houses on fire, burn out cars and force young families to flee their homes in the middle of the night leaving all their possessions. Will he ensure that the proposals for youth curfews are enforced when the crime and disorder Bill becomes law?

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments, and for the stress that she has placed on dealing with youth crime. That is a measure of the extent to which we have concentrated on youth crime and on preparation of measures in the crime and disorder Bill throughout the summer. We await comments on several consultation documents that include some of the measures that will address the problems to which she referred. The curfew proposals are practical and will work in the situations that she described, with youngsters of 10 and younger running roughshod around an area. We need to build confidence back into the system; we are determined to do that.

Mr. Evans: Has the Minister received any representations about the abuse of laser lights? I am sure that he has recently read in the newspapers about the abuse of what are normally presentational aids. When abused, they can cause temporary blindness; if stared at over even relatively short periods, they can cause more sinister damage to the eye. Will he ensure that his Department will spread the message loud and clear to people who abuse laser lights that they will face the full rigour of the law?

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, which arises whenever something legitimately available for sensible business and other purposes is misused or abused to the detriment of other people. The issue has certainly been raised with us, not least by the Police Superintendents Association. We are considering the medical evidence about the problems that can be caused and we wish to address the issue. We are awaiting evidence from some of the police associations about the extent to which their members have discovered problems. We need to understand the problem to address it properly. Many people will share the hon. Gentleman's concern.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Further to the point raised by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), at the weekend in my constituency a laser pen was pointed into the eyes of a bus driver, who was temporarily blinded. While I accept what my hon. Friend says about what his Department can do, will he ask the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs to look at the availability of those pens and at who can buy them?

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend makes a good point: we need to work across Departments. That is why I mentioned that we are discussing items that are available for legitimate use but that are being used by some people in the wrong way. We shall certainly consult colleagues about the best way to respond to the problem highlighted by the incident in his constituency.

Scottish Parliament

12. **Mr. Dalyell:** What consultation he has had with the Scottish Office since the referendum on the transfer of those responsibilities which are currently his to the Scottish Parliament. [11668]

Mr. Straw: Our proposals for devolution are set out in the White Paper, "Scotland's Parliament". There are no plans for my responsibilities to be transferred to the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Dalyell: What will be the demarcation between Edinburgh and Westminster in relation to the delicate issue of responsibility for drugs?

Mr. Straw: The White Paper, "Scotland's Parliament" makes it clear that the criminal law in relation to drugs will be a reserved matter and will remain the responsibility of my Department. The Scottish Executive will inherit the current responsibilities of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Advocate. Those responsibilities include drug misuse, health, treatment and education, as well as responsibility for the police and prosecution authorities' enforcement in Scotland of drug misuse legislation, which will be set by this House and Parliament.

Mr. Hogg: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, if the Government's proposals for devolution are enacted, the House will have no say over policies relating to Home Office type affairs, which are now the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland? Would it not be wrong, therefore, for Scottish Members of Parliament sitting in this House to have any say on Home Office affairs in so far as they relate to England?

Mr. Straw: I do not accept the assumption behind the right hon. and learned Gentleman's question, not least because I have made it clear that issues of criminal law relating to drugs will be a reserved matter for this Parliament. Therefore, it is entirely right that Members of Parliament, whichever constituencies they represent, should not only speak but vote on those matters.

Asylum Seekers

13. **Mr. Corbyn:** What is his latest estimate of the number of asylum seekers held in custody under the Immigration Acts. [11669]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As at 30 September 1997, the most recent date for which information is available, 772 persons who had sought asylum at some stage were recorded as being detained solely under Immigration Act powers. As I have already stated, we announced a review of detention policy before the recess.

Mr. Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. When he undertakes the review of the policy of internment of asylum seekers, will he bear it in mind that many of those who have been detained for many months have a deep sense of injustice? They have fled from oppressive societies where they have lived in great fear and have often suffered racist attacks, only to arrive in this country and find themselves in custody for several months. Does my hon. Friend recognise that that is an abuse of their rights? We should not have a routine policy of imprisonment—no other European country does. The measure should be used only in the most extreme circumstances and we should not keep more than 700 people in custody.

Mr. O'Brien: I do not accept what my hon. Friend says. There is no routine detention of persons. I would not accept that, and I am sure that the Government would not accept it. People are not detained merely because they are seeking asylum; other factors will always have a bearing on the likelihood of people complying with the conditions of temporary admission which determine the need for detention. At any one time, only about 1.5 per cent. of those who may have sought asylum are actually detained.

Mr. Brooke: Is the Minister contemplating an increase in the amount of provision in detention centres in order to reduce the pressure on prisons?

Mr. O'Brien: That is one of the issues that we shall have to examine as part of the review of detention. It is obviously preferable, where possible, to detain people under immigration powers in detention centres rather than in prisons but, given the numbers and pressures and the nature of some detainees who have been unable to adapt themselves to the more relaxed regime in detention centres, we sometimes have to use prisons.

Dr. Harris: Detaining up to 500 asylum seekers in prison establishments costs up to £20 million to £30 million a year. Does the Minister agree that that money could be better spent on providing prison places for the criminals who are currently in overcrowded prisons? Given that, at my suggestion, Sir David Ramsbotham has visited Campsfield House in my constituency, and given the critical report on Rochester prison and the likely critical report on Tinsley House, how many critical reports will the Minister have to receive before he ends the barbaric practice of using prisons? The Liberal Democrats have welcomed the Government's ethical foreign policy. How long do we have to wait for an ethical Home Office policy?

Mr. O'Brien: Presumably, the hon. Gentleman is saying that nobody should be held in detention. I was interested to hear that he asked Sir David Ramsbotham to act—probably before the hon. Gentleman did, I asked Sir David Ramsbotham to act. He conducted an inspection of Campsfield House at my request; he has briefed me on the result of his inquiries and will shortly be letting me have a full and detailed report of the situation. It is necessary to examine the way in which we use detention, and we are doing that. The prospects of releasing everybody are extremely unlikely. We need to use detention in certain cases. We want to apply a firm immigration policy; that is the Government's policy and that is what we shall deliver.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: I share the Minister's view that documentation is an important part of determining whether asylum seekers should be permitted to remain in this country, but may I take him back to the broader issue of border controls? I shall ask a question that the Home Secretary either did not know the answer to or would not come clean to the House about. Will the hon. Gentleman, who has direct responsibility for these matters, confirm that the terms of reference of the spending review made it legitimate for civil servants to produce the sort of proposals outlined in today's edition of *The Guardian*?

Mr. O'Brien: I make it clear that the Government will maintain firm immigration controls. Nothing will be done that undermines our ability to enforce firm immigration controls. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister secured our legal right to do that at Amsterdam, which is something the previous Government singularly failed to achieve. We shall maintain the enforceability of immigration controls. The document to which the right hon. Gentleman refers would appear to be merely a think piece—a summary of the views of some officials. Our determination and our commitments are clear: those commitments will be delivered. The people of Britain have voted for them and the people of Britain will get them.

Air Rifles

14. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** If he will review the licensing arrangements for the use of air rifles. [11670]

Mr. Michael: No firearms certificate is required at present to possess or use an air weapon unless it exceeds the statutory maximum power levels. There are, however, restrictions on purchase, possession and use, particularly by young people. Hon. Members will understand that we have concentrated on the Firearms (Amendment) Bill in order to ban private ownership of .22 pistols and to fulfil an election commitment with that measure. When that legislation has been dealt with, we shall consider carefully whether further restrictions are necessary, as part of a wider look at what other firearm controls may be needed to safeguard the public.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Does my hon. Friend accept that air weapons are increasingly responsible for injury to, and destruction of, wildlife to an alarming degree? Is it not a fact that children and young persons are increasingly responsible for the problems caused by the misuse of air weapons? I urge my hon. Friend to consider, as a matter of urgency, increasing the restrictions on ownership and use of air weapons. Will he consider banning them completely?

Mr. Michael: As I have said, we shall consider what is needed—particularly for the protection of the public—after the present legislation has been dealt with. On my hon. Friend's specific question, killing or injuring any bird or protected animal carries a fine of up to £5,000. Especially powerful air weapons—that is, rifles with a muzzle energy of more than 12 ft per pound and air pistols with a muzzle energy of more than 6 ft per pound—must be kept on a firearms certificate. Persons under 14 years of age may not be in possession of an air weapon unless as a member of an approved club, in a shooting gallery or under the supervision of a person over the age of 21. Purchase by persons under 17 is not permitted, nor is possession in a public place. There are laws in place regulating matters relevant to my hon. Friend's point, but I shall be happy to look at any evidence that he or others bring forward when we consider those issues further, in due course.

Criminal Justice (Voluntary Organisations)

15. **Mr. Letwin:** What meetings he and his colleagues have held with voluntary organisations concerned with the administration of justice and the treatment of offenders in the Home Office since 1 May; and if he will make a statement. [11671]

Mr. Michael: Since 1 May, my colleagues and I have held 10 such meetings in the Home Office. We have also attended a number of events outside the Home Office at the invitation of voluntary organisations concerned with the administration of justice and the treatment of offenders.

Mr. Letwin: Does the Minister accept the previous Government's extraordinary record in encouraging voluntary organisations in that sector? Does he have any proposals to improve on the measures that have already been taken?

Mr. Michael: I certainly agree that the measures taken by the previous Government were extraordinary, but voluntary organisations concerned with the administration of justice and the treatment of offenders feel that a great weight has been lifted from their shoulders. We are receiving a great deal of co-operation and enthusiasm from them in our measures to deal with crime and the problems arising from crime.

Mr. O'Hara: Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that the voluntary sector has an enormously important contribution to make to the implementation of important Government policies, not least in winning back our communities? Will he therefore express my personal appreciation that responsibility for the voluntary sector and volunteering has now returned to the Home Office and to Labour Home Office Ministers who have an appreciation and understanding of that important role, as was most certainly not the case under the previous Government?

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary welcomed the return of the voluntary and community unit to the Home Office and there is a great deal of enthusiasm on the part of Ministers for cementing the essential partnership between the voluntary sector and Government.

Mr. Beith: Will Ministers be meeting one of those organisations, the Howard League, to discuss the report that it published today? The report reveals the trebling of the number of teenage girls held in adult prisons, where they are subject to many risks and not provided with adequate rehabilitation. That is especially troubling when many of them are first offenders and could not be described as regular or hardened criminals.

Mr. Michael: We do meet the Howard League regularly and recently I spoke at its conference. The report is interesting. The Howard League takes a particular view on those matters—one that we discuss with it regularly.

Election Broadcasts

16. **Mr. Soley:** What proposals he has to review the Representation of the People Acts in relation to broadcasting during general elections. [11672]

Mr. George Howarth: My hon. Friend will be aware that we have no specific proposals to do that. However, the election that took place in May is the subject of a consultation exercise. I understand that broadcasters are to meet officials in the Home Office to discuss the operation of section 93 of the Representation of the People Act 1983. If they come up with any proposals, obviously we shall consider them on their merits.

Mr. Soley: There is considerable and growing concern among broadcasters, politicians and the public about the way in which our elections are covered; that coverage should allow open and fair debate in a political situation. Would it not be a good idea, if we did conduct a radical review of the Representation of the People Acts, to consider ways in which constituencies are covered in general elections and by-elections, to allow a more free and open debate?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is right. There is a problem in as much as, if one or two candidates in a constituency are covered in a broadcast, a minor candidate further down the list can prevent the broadcast proceeding because of the need for equal coverage. However, it is a complex matter and I believe that, before I give my particular view on it, it would be right to receive representations from the broadcasters. That process is in train.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Given that, by the time of the next election, 40 or more digital television channels will be available to viewers, what restrictions does the Home

Office intend to place on the Prime Minister against the multiple showing of the type of video that we saw at the Commonwealth Heads of Government conference?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman should be very careful. I think that the more that the general public see of the Prime Minister, the happier they are.

Crime Victims

18. **Mr. Watts:** If he will make a statement on the treatment of victims by the criminal justice system. [11674]

Mr. Michael: The Government are firmly committed to helping victims of crime and to taking action to redress the balance of the criminal justice system in the favour of victims. We have already taken several steps to achieve that. We are giving Victim Support an extra £1 million a year to develop its work with victims and witnesses and to establish a national telephone helpline for victims. We have established an interdepartmental group to undertake an urgent, wide-ranging review of ways to assist vulnerable or intimidated witnesses. There are several other proposals, including sentencing proposals.

Mr. Watts: Can my hon. Friend give the House an update on any progress that has been made in speeding up the process of dealing with cases that involve young persistent criminals?

Mr. Michael: The steps that the Government are taking are intended to halve the time that it takes for persistent offenders to come before the courts. As the Audit Commission showed last year, it currently takes, on average, a ludicrous four-and-a-half months to get young offenders before the court. *[Interruption.]* I take it that that was applause for our intention to cut that time. We intend to halve that time, so that persistent young offenders are dealt with quickly by the courts.

Illegal Drugs

19. **Mr. Flynn:** What new measures he intends to introduce to reduce the demand for illegal drugs. [11675]

Mr. George Howarth: My hon. Friend will be aware that we intend to advance the proposal for a treatment and testing order in the new legislation that will be coming forward shortly and that a United Kingdom anti-drugs co-ordinator was appointed recently. The Government are determined to combat the menace of drugs in our society.

Mr. Flynn: Did my hon. Friend read the report this weekend, in the newspaper *Disability Now*, of the results of a survey of 200 severely disabled people, who said that they are using cannabis as a medicine and that they are breaking the law to do so, because of its unique medicinal effects for the treatment of multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy and glaucoma? Why is it that heroin and cocaine can be legally prescribed, but the tens of thousands of people who use the much milder drug cannabis for pain relief have to depend on criminals and the illegal market?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend will be aware that all drugs used for medical purposes have to be scientifically tested. If cannabis succeeds in those tests—if it is proved that it has medicinal qualities—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has already made it clear that he would be willing to consider allowing medicinal use of it. Unfortunately, as of now, there is no such evidence.

Community Policing

21. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** If he will list the steps he is taking to establish the levels of public satisfaction with community policing in each area. [11677]

Mr. Michael: The Police Act 1996 requires police authorities to obtain the views of local people on the policing of their area. That is done by a variety of means. Once our new statutory duties on local authorities and the police to establish local crime prevention partnerships are in place, there will be an obligation on those two bodies to conduct a crime and disorder audit in their areas and to consult the local public on it. That will improve the way that the police consider the local public's views on, and experience of, crime and the fear of crime.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the public's concern about community policing. He will also be aware that the police do not view bobbies on the beat as the most effective way of policing. Given the importance of the public's perception of policing in their areas being favourable, how does the Minister intend to deal with that?

Mr. Michael: I am not quite sure what question the hon. Gentleman is asking. We intend to ensure that the police, with local authorities and the wider community, fully understand and analyse the problems of crime and disorder in their areas so as to target them specifically and to cut crime. Our target is to cut crime, not to watch it go on increasing.

Viscount Tonypandy

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: All Members of the House have heard with sorrow of the death of Viscount Tonypandy, who was our Speaker from February 1976 to June 1983. I wish, on behalf of all parties and of each and every right hon. and hon. Member of this House, to pay a tribute to the memory of one of my most distinguished predecessors. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Born in the mining communities of south Wales, George Thomas became a schoolmaster and, at the age of 25, a Methodist lay preacher. He entered the House in the vast intake of new Members in 1945. He quickly adapted to the ways of the House and, rather unusually, was chosen as a member of the Speaker's Panel of Chairmen at an early stage of his parliamentary career.

On the return of the Labour Government in 1964, George Thomas held junior office in the Home Office, the Welsh Office and the Commonwealth Office. It was a cause of great pride to him when, in 1968, he was appointed to succeed Mr. Cledwyn Hughes as Secretary of State for Wales. When his party returned to office in 1974, he was asked to take the post of Chairman of Ways and Means, and such was his distinction in that office that it came as no surprise when, two years later, he was unanimously elected Speaker on the retirement of Selwyn Lloyd.

For the next seven years, George Thomas was a dominant figure in the Chair. His presence was magisterial, but at the same time he appeared human and friendly. He was particularly adept at breaking tensions in the House with his own brand of humour. Radio listeners—this was before television was brought into the Chamber—became familiar with the attractive Welsh lilt of his voice.

Outside the Chamber, Viscount Tonypandy's influence was considerable. He was the first Chairman of the House of Commons Commission. In Speaker's House, many Members of all parties, including younger ones, had reason to be grateful for his wise advice and friendship. On his retirement, the then Prime Minister summed up the feelings of all Members when she said:

> "You have upheld with a special combination of impartiality and authority the dignity of your office and of this House".—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1983; Vol. 42, c. 920.]

After his retirement, George Thomas became a valued contributor from the Cross Benches in that other place, and despite lengthy periods of ill health, he kept up his many outside charitable and other activities, most notably as chairman and later president of the National Children's Home. But the place where he liked most to be in his later years was in his beloved south Wales.

In saluting Viscount Tonypandy's memory, I know that I speak for the whole House in thanking God for his distinctive life of service to this House, to the country at large and to all his fellow men and women. We offer our condolences to his family and friends.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Winchester (Election)

3.34 pm

Madam Speaker: I have one other duty to perform. It is my duty to report to the House that I have received a communication from the Queen's Bench division of the High Court of Justice, in which two of Her Majesty's judges have informed me of their determination in the matter of the election of a Member for the constituency of Winchester on 1 May last.

The court's determination, reached in accordance with the provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1983, is that: there were breaches by the returning officer's agent of rules 20 and 37, as set out in schedule 1 to the Act; that the result of the election was affected thereby; that Mark Oaten was not duly elected and returned as Member of Parliament for Winchester; and that the election on 1 May 1997 is void.

I shall cause the full text of the court's communication to be recorded in the Journal. The next step is for a writ to be issued for a new election, and I hope that the necessary notice will be brought before the House in the very near future.

We now have a statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Economic and Monetary Union

3.36 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): With permission, Madam Speaker, I want to make a statement on economic and monetary union.

Since the end of the second world war, Britain has faced no question more important and more contentious than that of our relationship with Europe. Divisions within Governments of both parties, and hence indecision, have made British policy towards Europe over many years inconsistent and unclear. The economic consequences of those weaknesses have been a loss of international initiative and influence, recurrent instability and continuing questioning of our long-term economic direction.

To break with this legacy and to establish clear national purpose, which has eluded us for decades, economic leadership is essential, and Britain must now make the difficult decisions on Europe, however hard.

The decision on a single currency is probably the most important question that this country is likely to face in our generation. Yet until now, there has been no detailed examination by Government of the practical economic issues of EMU and no proper preparation for a decision, because no previous Government could agree on whether they supported it in principle, nor whether there was an overriding constitutional objection on grounds of sovereignty; nor whether, even if a single currency worked and worked well, the Government would wish to be part of it. Forms of words like, "keeping the option open"—while no preparations were ever made to render that option practicable—have similarly served as a pretext for postponing the hard choices.

Now is the time to make these hard choices and set a long-term direction for our economic future in Europe. So I shall deal in turn with the question of principle of economic monetary union, the constitutional implications and the economic tests that have to be met. In each area, I shall set down the Government's policy.

When we came into government, I asked the Treasury to carry out an assessment of the economic tests that have to be met. Accompanying my statement is a detailed and comprehensive Treasury assessment, which I am publishing today, copies of which are available in the Vote Office.

I start with the question of principle. The potential benefits for Britain of a successful single currency are obvious in terms of trade, transparency of costs and currency stability. Of course, I stress that it must be soundly based. It must succeed. But if it works economically, it is, in our view, worth doing. So in principle, a successful single currency within a single European market would be of benefit to Europe and Britain. Secondly, it must be clearly recognised that to share a common monetary policy with other states represents a major pooling of economic sovereignty.

There are those who argue that this should be a constitutional bar to British participation in a single currency, regardless of the economic benefits that it could bring to the people of this country. In other words, they would rule out a single currency in principle, even if it were in the best economic interests of the country.

This is an understandable objection, and one argued from principle, but in our view it is wrong. If a single currency would be good for British jobs, British business and future prosperity, it is right in principle to join. The constitutional issue is a factor in the decision, but it is not an overriding one. Rather, it signifies that, in order for monetary union to be right for Britain, the economic benefit should be clear and unambiguous.

I therefore conclude on the question of principle that if, in the end, the single currency is successful and the economic case is clear and unambiguous, the Government believe that Britain should be part of it.

There is a third issue of principle—the consent of the British people. Because of the magnitude of the decision, we believe, again as a matter of principle, that, whenever the decision to enter is taken by Government, it should be put to a referendum of the British people. Whenever this issue arises, under this Government there will be a referendum. Government, Parliament and the people must all agree.

We conclude that the determining factor as to whether Britain joins a single currency is the national economic interest, and whether the economic case for doing so is clear and unambiguous.

I turn now to the Treasury's detailed assessment of the five economic tests that define whether a clear and unambiguous case can be made. These tests are, first, whether there can be sustainable convergence between Britain and the economies of a single currency; secondly, whether there is sufficient flexibility to cope with economic change; thirdly, the effect on investment; fourthly, the impact on our financial services generally; and fifthly, whether it is good for employment.

Of these, the first and most critical is convergence: can we be confident that the United Kingdom business cycle has converged with that of other European countries, so that the British economy can have stability and prosperity within a common European monetary policy? That convergence must be capable of being sustained and likely to be sustained. In other words, we must demonstrate a settled period of convergence.

Currently, Britain's business cycle is out of line with those of our European partners. British interest rates are 7 per cent.—the level set by the Bank of England in order to achieve the inflation target—but in Germany and France, interest rates are close to 3 per cent. Across the continent, because business cycles are more coincident, short-term interest rates have been converging for some time.

This divergence of economic cycles is in part a reflection of historic structural differences between the United Kingdom and other European economies, in particular the pattern of our trade and North sea oil. These differences are becoming less distinct as trade with the rest of Europe grows and the single market deepens. However, divergence is also a legacy of Britain's past susceptibility to boom and bust—the damaging boom of the late 1980s, the severe recession of the early 1990s and the previous Government's failure to raise interest rates early enough in the current economic cycle.

Since coming into office, the Government have introduced long-term measures to ensure that we are capable of maintaining stability, by giving operational responsibility to the Bank of England for interest rates and by implementing our deficit reduction plan for public borrowing.

We will need a period of stability with continuing toughness on inflation and public borrowing. The Treasury's assessment is that, at present, the UK's

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

economic cycle is not convergent with our European partners, and that this divergence could continue for some time. To demonstrate sustainable convergence will take a period of years.

To be successful in a monetary union, countries will need even more flexibility to adjust to change and to unexpected economic events once the ability of countries to vary their interest rates and their exchange rates has gone, and the euro and a single European interest rate are in place. Flexibility may be particularly important for the United Kingdom if there is any risk that our business cycle has not fully converged with those of other European countries.

The Treasury assessment on the second test—flexibility—is that, in Britain, persistent long-term unemployment and lack of skills, and in some areas lack of competition, point to the need for more flexibility to adapt to change and to meet the new challenges of adjustment. The Government have begun to implement a programme for investing in education and training, helping people from welfare to work and improving the workings of our markets.

Of course, other European countries need to tackle unemployment and inflexibility to make sure that Europe as a whole is able to withstand any shocks that arise. The Government will continue to argue that employability, flexibility and stronger competition policies must be a top priority so that monetary union can be successful.

The third test is investment: whether joining monetary union would create better conditions for businesses to make long-term decisions to invest in Britain. The Treasury assessment is that, above all, business needs long-term economic stability and a well-functioning European single market. It concludes that membership of a successful single currency would help us to create the conditions for higher and more productive investment in Britain. The worst case for investment would be for Britain to enter EMU without proper preparations and without sufficient convergence, with all the uncertainty that that would entail.

The fourth test asks what impact membership of the single currency would have on our financial services industry. EMU will affect that industry more profoundly and more immediately than any other sectors of the economy. The Treasury's assessment is that we can now be confident that the industry has the potential to thrive whether the United Kingdom is in or out of EMU, so long as it is properly prepared. However, the benefits of new opportunities from a single currency could be easier to tap from within the euro zone, and that could help the City of London to strengthen its position as the leading financial centre in Europe.

For millions of people, the most practical question is whether membership of a successful single currency would be good for prosperity, and particularly for jobs. The Treasury's assessment is that our measures to create employment and for welfare state reform must accompany any move to a single currency.

Ultimately, we conclude that whether a single currency is good for jobs in practice comes back to the question of sustainable convergence. A successful single currency would provide far greater trade and business in Europe. The Treasury assessment is that, in vital areas, the economy is not yet ready for entry, and that much remains to be done. The previous policy of keeping options open without actively making preparations has left parts of the economy unprepared. Our overall assessment is that Britain needs both a period of preparation and a settled period of sustainable convergence—and both require stability.

Applying those five economic tests leads the Government to the following clear conclusions. British membership of a single currency in 1999 could not meet the tests, and therefore is not in the country's economic interests. There is no proper convergence between the British economy and other European economies now, and to try to join now would be to accept a monetary policy that would suit other European economies but not our own. We will therefore be notifying our European partners, in accordance with the Maastricht treaty, that we will not seek membership of the single currency on 1 January 1999.

The issue then arises as to the period after 1 January 1999. We could simply leave the options open as before, but with no clear direction either way for the rest of the Parliament. That would be politically easy, but it would be wrong. There would be instability and perpetual speculation about "in or out", "sooner or later", that would cause difficulties in the financial markets and for business and industry. It would make it harder to prepare for the possibility of a single currency because every step in preparation every time the issue was discussed would feed fresh bouts of speculation.

It must be in the country's interests to have a stable framework within which to plan. We are fortified in this because, on the economic tests that we have set out, the practical difficulties of joining a single currency in this Parliament all point to the same conclusion.

There is no need, legally, formally or politically, to renounce our option to join for the period between 1 January 1999 and the end of the Parliament—nor would it be sensible to do so. There is no requirement to do so under the treaty, and, what is more, no Government can ever predict every set of economic circumstances that might arise. What we can, and what we should, do is to state a clear view about the practicability of joining monetary union during that period.

In applying our economic tests, two things are clear: there is no realistic prospect of our having demonstrated before the end of this Parliament that we have achieved convergence that is sustainable and settled rather than transitory; and Government have only just begun to put in place the necessary preparations that would allow us to do so. Other countries have for some years been making detailed preparations for a single currency. For all the reasons given, we have not.

Therefore, barring some fundamental or unforeseen change in economic circumstances, making a decision to join during this Parliament is not realistic. It is therefore sensible for business and the country to plan on the basis that, in this Parliament, we do not propose to enter a single currency.

There are those who urge us to seek consent in principle through a referendum now or soon, with a view to entry some time later. Any serious gap between the referendum and the actual entry date would undermine the conclusions of the referendum. Because the essential decision is economic, it can be taken only at a time when the Government and the people can judge that sustainable convergence has been established. So, in our view, the interval between the decision to join and our joining must not be unduly protracted.

I have said that, if a single currency works and is successful, Britain should join it. We should therefore begin now to prepare ourselves so that, should we meet the economic tests, we can make a decision to join a successful single currency early in the next Parliament. At present, with no preparation, that is not a practical option. We must put ourselves in a position where Britain can exercise genuine choice.

The questions of preparation are immense—practical questions for business as well as for Government. For example, euro notes and coins will be circulating across Europe from 1 January 2002. Some companies, such as Marks and Spencer, have already decided to accept euros in Britain; others will want advice on what is best for them.

Because both the Government and business must prepare intensively during the next few years, we will commence work on the detailed transition arrangements for the possible introduction of the euro in Britain, including notes and coins, should we wish to enter. We will step up the work on what business should do now to prepare for the introduction of the euro in 1999, whether we are in or out. We will work with business on what Government must do to prepare for EMU should we decide to join in the next Parliament.

To help with essential preparations, I have invited the Governor of the Bank of England and Sir Colin Marshall, president of the Confederation of British Industry, to join me and the President of the Board of Trade in leading a standing committee on preparations for EMU. I am pleased to say that they have agreed. I am also inviting the president of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce to join us.

I can also announce that, from January, a series of regional and sectoral conferences on preparations for monetary union will be held. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has today decided to extend Lord Simon's Treasury responsibilities to include European business preparations in this Government, covering the long-term planning of the new standing committee.

In addition to those practical preparations, there are reforms we can make that are right in themselves in the national economic interest, and will help us to meet the five economic tests. We will promote greater flexibility in the UK economy and in Europe through the "getting Europe to work" initiative. We will introduce new competition legislation that draws on the best of European and wider international policy and practice, as well as continuing to negotiate to secure the best interests of our financial sector and for the opening up of the single market in financial services. We will set as one of the key objectives of our European presidency completion of the European single market.

In my Mansion House speech, I said that, if we succeeded in strengthening the ability of the British economy to sustain growth without inflation, and if international conditions permitted, I would hope to lower the inflation target. So we will monitor our inflation target, and will do so in the light of the European central bank. We will ensure that our fiscal rules and our deficit reduction plan continue to be consistent with the terms of the stability pact, thus underlining our commitment to avoid an excessive deficit under article 104c of the treaty and supporting greater co-ordination in ECOFIN. In Britain's interests, we need to keep inflation low and public borrowing firmly under control.

The single currency will affect Britain, in or out. It is in the British national interest for it to work. Vital decisions will be made during our European presidency in the first half of next year. We will use our position constructively and supportively, and we will play a full part in ensuring that the single currency's launch is successful—something that is in Britain's interests as well as in Europe's interests.

To sum up, we believe that, in principle, British membership of a successful single currency would be beneficial to Britain and Europe; the key factor is whether the economic benefits of joining for business and industry are clear and unambiguous. If they are, there is no constitutional bar to British membership of EMU.

Applying the economic tests, it is not in this country's interest to join in the first wave of EMU starting on 1 January 1999, and, barring some fundamental and unforeseen change in economic circumstances, making a decision in this Parliament to join is not realistic. To give ourselves a genuine choice in the future, it is essential that Government and business prepare intensively during this Parliament so that Britain will be in a position to join a single currency, should we wish to, early in the next Parliament.

On Europe, the time of indecision is over. The period for practical preparation has begun. Today we begin to build a new consensus—modern and outward looking—for a country that throughout its history has looked outward to the world. We are the first British Government to declare for the principle of monetary union, the first to state that there is no overriding constitutional bar to membership, the first to make clear and unambiguous economic benefit to this country the decisive test, the first to offer our strong and constructive support to our European partners to create more employment and more prosperity.

The policy that I have outlined will bring stability to business, direction to our economy and long-term purpose to our country. It is the right policy for Britain in Europe. More important, it is the right policy for the future of Britain. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Does the Chancellor accept that his statement today was forced out of him by the confused, contradictory and improper briefings by his own office in recent weeks—briefings that have displayed contempt for the House, which should have been told first; contempt for financial probity by releasing to selected journalists market-sensitive information that caused turmoil in financial markets; and contempt for the truth, since the briefings, which we must assume he authorised, are shown, at least in part, to have been false? Would the Chancellor like to take this opportunity to apologise to the House and to the savers and pensioners whose investments have been put at risk by the cavalier way in which he has treated them?

I shall deal briefly with the confusion—the Chancellor's private office assured me today that he would deal with this in his statement, but he did not—that

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led up to the statement. Who was the "unnamed Government Minister" quoted on 26 September in a *Financial Times* story which said that the Government would make a

"declaration shortly on UK entry soon after the EMU launch",

which caused the biggest movement in financial markets in recent times? Who was he? Has the right hon. Gentleman inquired? Does he know?

Why did the Chancellor allow a false market to persist for some three weeks before effectively repudiating that story? Does he realise that, if any private individual did that, they would be guilty of a very serious offence? Is the Chancellor aware—*[Interruption.]* Is the Chancellor aware of anything? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The Chancellor was heard. We have just been listening to a very crucial statement, a very serious statement. I hope that the House will deal with it as such.

Mr. Lilley: Is the Chancellor aware that I have just received a letter from the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board saying that he will look into some of the matters that I have raised, but that he cannot investigate the main allegation, because

"where allegations of market misconduct are of a criminal nature, they will not fall naturally for the SIB to pursue"?

Will the Chancellor and his staff co-operate with any inquiry by the market authorities or by the Treasury Select Committee?

Was not the confusion caused by the *Financial Times* story, amplified by the diverging statements that the Chancellor and his press officer gave to *The Times* on 18 October? Can the Chancellor tell the House whether he authorised his press secretary to give certain newspapers—not to mention the denizens of the Red Lion—information which should have been given to Parliament, and which was highly market-sensitive? Did he authorise that? Will he tell the House, yes or no? Can he now say whether he authorised the briefing by his press secretary?

If the Chancellor refuses to say that he authorised the briefing—if he dissociates himself from Mr. Whelan's announcement—surely Mr. Whelan should resign. If, however, the Chancellor accepts responsibility for the release of market-sensitive information, can he tell the House of any Treasury Minister who has released such information to a journalist and has subsequently remained in office?

It was that briefing that precipitated today's statement. The question is, was the policy forced to fit the briefing, or did the briefing reflect what was already settled Government policy?

Did the Foreign Secretary know before that briefing that this was Government policy? Did the President of the Board of Trade know that it was policy? Clearly not. We know that the Deputy Prime Minister had no idea that it was Government policy; we are pretty certain that the Secretary of State for Health did not know, when he appeared on television to defend it. Was the Prime Minister himself fully aware of what his Chancellor intended to release? *[Interruption.]* I think that the Prime Minister is telling the Chancellor that his position is unassailable.

The fact is that the dither, dodge and denial of the past three weeks have been a rollercoaster ride on the stock market that has wiped billions of pounds from pensioners' savings. Is that what the Chancellor meant when he said that his priority was ensuring a "period of stability" in the financial markets? Can he now give the House a cast-iron assurance that, in future, the release of all market-sensitive information of this kind will be carried out by democratically accountable Ministers in the House, not by unelected spin doctors in secret briefings?

Now we turn to the substance of this belated statement—*[Interruption.]* I understand that Labour Members are embarrassed by the confusion and ambiguity of their previous briefings. The fact is, however, that, although we were promised an unambiguous and totally clear statement, even today's statement by the Chancellor allows the possibility of entry during the current Parliament, in the light of what the Chancellor calls a possible unexpected or "unforeseen change in . . . circumstances". Can he give us examples of circumstances that might cause him to change his mind? [*Laughter.*] Can he tell us the type of thing of which he is thinking? Is it not the case—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I would be obliged if the House would now come to order.

Mr. Lilley: Is it not the case that we now know when we probably will not enter the single currency, but do not know when, if ever, we will be ready to enter the single currency?

In essence, the Chancellor's policy remains that we will join when the time is right, but that it will probably not be during this Parliament. Does that move him forward? Is he not trying to have it both ways—trying to please those who do not want us to enter, including his friends in the Murdoch press, while declaring a commitment in principle to entry?

The Chancellor said that he will prepare the country and industry for entry, but there is nothing in his statement about one condition of entry that is laid down in the treaty: the two years' membership of the exchange rate mechanism. Why is there no mention of that? Is he saying that we will not abide by, or that he has sought a waiver of, that condition? If so, why is he afraid of Britain paddling in the shallow end, when he is prepared later to dive in the deep end of EMU?

Is the Chancellor planning in the next few years to apply for money from the European Union's propaganda fund to persuade the British people to abandon the pound? Has he already asked for such money? If he does so, does he intend that all sides of the argument should receive finance? Would it not be odd for the Government to accept European money given that they seek to ban foreign donations to political parties?

Is the Chancellor asking British industry to prepare now for entry at an unknown and unforeseeable date? Where does that leave small businesses: should they invest at this stage in cash registers and accounting systems to deal with the single currency?

The Chancellor said that he has five tests. The truth is that none of those tests is objective, measurable and capable of independent assessment. Does not the fact that the ERM would have passed all his five tests show that they are not a very effective measure?

Does the Chancellor not realise that this is the most momentous decision that this country will take? It is more significant than joining the ERM, than going back on to the gold standard in 1925 or than joining the Bretton Woods system: they all had an exit door, whereas the single currency is intended to be permanent and irrevocable. We must be convinced that it is good for Britain not just at a moment of time, but for all future time; that it will be beneficial not just in good times, but in bad times; and that it will benefit not only some companies, but the whole country.

The Chancellor's first test is the business cycle. He is right to say that our cycle is out of line with the rest of the Community. Surely he realises that it has been getting further out of step, and there is no reason to suppose that it will move back in step in the short term.

The Chancellor says that he wants more flexibility of labour markets. Why, by signing up to the social chapter, have we handed over to countries with inflexible labour markets the power to set our rules? Does he agree that France and Italy are moving towards less flexible labour markets, as they insist on legalising a 35-hour week and imposing that on their companies?

Financial services are an important part of our industry. Why does not the Chancellor refer to the danger mentioned in previous Treasury documents that membership of a single currency would mean centralisation of regulation of financial markets, which would deprive us of the flexible regulation that has enabled the City to become a pre-eminent financial centre not just in Europe but in the world?

The greatest weakness of the tests that the Chancellor has laid down is the absence of any political or constitutional test. He cannot wipe aside—as he tried to do in his preamble—the constitutional issue as if this matter merely concerned monetary policy. The key issue is whether entry into the single currency requires centralisation of taxation and of borrowing powers. Will there be the power at the centre to transfer resources from prosperous countries to those that are handicapped by joining the single currency?

Does the right hon. Gentleman not recognise that, to most of our continental partners, this is not primarily, or to some extent even at all, an economic venture, but a political venture? Does he not recognise that, up to now, there has never been a currency without a Government to run it, or a Government worthy of the name without a currency to run? The attempt to establish a single currency in Europe without a Government to run it is intended by many to be temporary, not permanent.

Why does not the right hon. Gentleman tell us where the Government stand on that pre-eminent issue? Does he want to see, will he connive in, will he agree to, the centralisation of political power over tax, borrowing and the transfer of resources to other countries in the single currency area? Until he answers that question, we cannot accept that it is right to sign up in principle to a single currency.

Mr. Brown: I shall answer the substantive points one by one.

It is remarkable that the shadow Chancellor of the Conservative party, which has been talking about this issue for 18 years, can come to the House, even after his session in Eastbourne last week, to draw conclusions, and not be able to tell us where the party stands on the issue of principle. Where does it stand not as to whether there are constitutional implications but as to whether there is a constitutional bar to membership? It cannot say whether the economic tests will be decisive, and the shadow Chancellor now tells us that he even opposes preparations for a single currency. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer his questions."] I have to ask him these questions.

I have to ask the Conservative party these questions. Does it support the principle of a single currency? We do. The Conservative party cannot say, because it is divided. Does it believe that there is a constitutional bar to membership of a single currency? Some say yes, some say no. They cannot agree.

Do Conservatives believe that economic tests should be decisive in this matter? The shadow Chancellor could not tell us, but Conservatives must tell us what they believe. Equally, do they believe that sustainable convergence, once achieved, is a means by which we could move forward to a single currency? On each of those issues of principle, it was striking that the shadow Chancellor was absolutely silent: he did not address them.

I come to the shadow Chancellor's specific questions. He asked about what he called stock market movements in relation to statements. I shall read to him the letter that was sent to him by the Governor of the Bank of England. It states:

> "Neither the Government nor its agent . . . benefited in any way from the recent movements in the gilt market . . . The movement you highlight—sterling's rise on Friday 17 October . . . was in our assessment unrelated to the interview that the Chancellor published in the Times the next day."

When he was reading the letter from the SIB, the right hon. Gentleman might have told us exactly what was in it—that there has been no notification of the determination of an infringement whatever. The shadow Chancellor would do better to withdraw his allegations.

I come now to specific questions. It is not our intention to join the ERM. There are no additional powers related to taxation in relation to the single currency; and, of course, on taxation matters there is the British veto. The shadow Chancellor asked in what circumstances we would change our view. I said precisely in my statement that they were unforeseen circumstances, which means that they cannot be foreseen. On the question of convergence, I made it absolutely clear—as I think the shadow Chancellor will acknowledge—that I was not talking about convergence at one point in time as being the decisive test for a single currency. I was talking about a sustained and durable period of convergence—a settled period of convergence—which in our view would be necessary.

It comes back to this one question. We say that, if the economic benefits are clear and unambiguous, in the national interest, we should join, if the public are prepared to support it. The shadow Chancellor cannot say whether, even if the economic benefits to the country were compelling in terms of jobs, industry and commerce—even if it were proven to him that those economic benefits were compelling—he would be prepared to recommend joining. In other words, whether it be for reasons of

[Mr. Brown]

division, dogma or anti-Europeanism on the part of the Conservative party, the national interest would come second to sorting out its internal problems.

The leader of the Conservative party reflects those problems. He said at one stage that it would not join the single currency on principle. Then he said that it would not join for 30 or 40 years. Then he said that it would not join for five years. Then he said that it would not join for the foreseeable circumstances. Now he says from Eastbourne that it will not join for two Parliaments. That is a recipe whereby there will be no Conservative Government for five years, for 10 years, for 40 years, for all the foreseeable circumstances.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): We Liberal Democrats can and do accept much of the tone, and some of the substance, of the Chancellor's statement. If the Chancellor and the Government are aiming to build a national consensus in favour of a single currency, they will have our unqualified support, but, if that is to be achieved, does he not accept that we need some clarity and some leadership, and that beneath the warm words in his statement there is still doubt and indecision?

Does the Chancellor not accept that he is effectively saying that Britain will not join monetary union in this Parliament? He has not bolted the door, but it does now appear to have been closed. Does he not remember saying in July that Britain should take its decisions on EMU for economic reasons and

"not on the basis of a timetable that has been set politically"?

But is not today's statement all about setting a political timetable?

Does the Chancellor no longer agree with the director-general of the Confederation of British Industry that there is "no economic case" for ruling out entry to the single currency in this Parliament? Does he really believe that business will invest valuable time and money in something as uncertain and distant as what he is offering today? Does he really expect business to make that commitment? Can he not accept that, despite the good intentions in the statement, the danger is that it risks replacing a strategy of "wait and see" with one of "wait, and wait, and wait"?

If that is true, will Britain's economic interests not be fundamentally damaged? The five economic tests that the Chancellor has set out are so elastic that they could stretch to the moon and back. Will he not explain how they are to be met in terms that people can understand, so that they can make a judgment as to when and how entry will be made?

Finally, will the Chancellor recognise that, if we leave ourselves out for this Parliament and, by implication, for much of the next Parliament, we rule ourselves out of giving a lead to shaping monetary union in terms of achieving convergence and being successful? Does not the national interest require us to be there?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his contribution to the debate. I will tell him where we are agreed. We are agreed on the principle. We are agreed that there is no constitutional bar to membership, that national economic interest must be the decisive test, and that we should prepare to join; but the question that I have to ask him is whether he believes that we should join irrespective of whether it can be demonstrated that there is sustainable convergence. It is a question whether we get it right or we get it quickly.

The hon. Gentleman suggests that it is important to get it quickly. I suggest to him that, for the British national interest, it is important to get it right. That is the only disagreement on this issue between him and me. The setting of an artificial economic or calendar timetable for Britain in this matter—when he knows perfectly well that, under the previous Government, preparations were not made, and that the business cycle is out of synch with that of our continental partners—is not in the best interests of Britain.

Where the hon. Gentleman should agree with us is that a national consensus can now be built on the need to take the preparations actively that are necessary, so that, if the country so wishes, it can join a single currency early in the next Parliament.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that he and the Government deserve great credit for committing themselves to the principle of a single currency and for putting forward a programme of preparation which will, I hope, enable us to join it? In short, in that respect, today's statement is an historic step forward for this country.

My right hon. Friend knows that I share the concerns of the CBI and the TUC that the Government are virtually ruling out joining a single currency in the lifetime of this Parliament. May I just add that, the longer we wait to join a successful single currency, the more we are at risk of being marginalised not only in Europe but in the world?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a long-standing supporter of the European cause and who has written widely on such matters. I am sure that it is true to say that he would have liked to join the single currency in January 1999, but he must accept that, while we agree on the principle and agree that there is no constitutional bar, the fact is that the proper preparations for Britain were never made under the previous Government. The structural and other reforms that are necessary to bring us to the point of decision have not been made.

It is not realistic to plan on the basis that we will join in this Parliament, and the reasons for that must be absolutely clear to people who have listened to the statement today: it is stability that matters; we must achieve sustainable convergence, and that cannot be achieved overnight; and we must make the proper preparations as a country. Once the country looks at the analysis by the Treasury on the whole question of economic tests, it will agree with what I have said today.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): Does the Chancellor agree that the bizarre incompetence of his team a week ago has forced him to come to the House and concede, as I have long suspected, that he essentially agrees with me on the main point of this great issue?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, if the other member states of the European Union go ahead with economic and monetary union, and if they create a sound monetary structure, it is inevitable, sooner or later, that it will be in this country's interests to join that economic and monetary union? If we mishandle the timing of that decision, we run the risk of a period when we will have second-rate economic prospects, when this country will be a second choice for inward investment, and when we will play a second-division role in the affairs of the European Union.

If what we are considering today is the handling and the timing of that decision and what is or is not foreseeable, does the right hon. Gentleman also accept that the timetable that he suddenly produced today to put flesh on the bones of Charlie Whelan's timetable of a week ago has nothing to do with a lack of preparation, because he inherited contingency work which he is now bringing to fruition in the Treasury where he took over? It also has nothing to do with when our economy is synchronised with those on the continent, which is extremely important but unforeseeable, but has everything to do with the obsession of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor with the management of the press, Rupert Murdoch's press in particular, and the fact that they are in a total panic about when and how they will face a referendum, if they ever get around to joining.

Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that that approach causes great damage to the very stability that he says he wants to see in our affairs; causes great damage to people's confidence in this country's economic prospects; and causes immense damage to any confidence in the decision-handling abilities of himself and his right hon. Friend?

Mr. Brown: The former Chancellor says that he agrees with me; his problem is that he does not agree with the leader of his party. In fact, very few in his parliamentary party agree with him. I said earlier that I was the first Chancellor in a Government to say that we supported the principle of monetary union, but that is not strictly true: the right hon. and learned Gentleman said that he supported it, but the problem was that he was speaking in a personal capacity. It was not the then Government's official policy—and now we find that even the Prime Minister of that Government did not agree with the official policy at the time.

We are agreed on the principle. The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that preparations have been properly in hand—perhaps he did not tell the then Prime Minister about what he was planning in the Treasury at the time—but I can tell him that we are not prepared to enter a single currency, and that preparations have not been made here as they have been made in other European countries. If he reflects on it for a minute, he will recognise that that is the case.

We have to be satisfied that we have met the five economic tests that I set out. If we do so, it will be appropriate to put the question to the country, but if we cannot, it would be irresponsible for a Government to recommend entry, and I will not do so. We will make a decision only when we know that we can meet the substantial economic tests that we have set out: that will be the true test of national economic interest.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement will be remembered not for its economic analysis but because he has told us that the Government believe that the electors have no right to determine our economic policy through the ballot box, that Parliament has no right to play a part in determining that policy, and that the Government will not in future claim to control the key levers of power that determine our people's standard of living? On that question, fundamental differences cut across all parties.

With 18.5 million unemployed in the European Union, few people will accept that the move into a deflationary system will be beneficial. I agree with my right hon. Friend that the issue is probably the most important to face this generation, so will he give a categorical assurance on behalf of the Government that, when the debate takes place, all members of his party and everyone else will be able to speak their mind on every aspect of European policy without any gags being imposed to prevent them from expressing an honest opinion?

Mr. Brown: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman has been prevented from speaking his mind for some time. On unemployment, it is precisely because of that problem that we have a welfare-to-work programme; we are dealing with that issue. On the consent of the British people, I think that he would recognise that our decision to hold a referendum if a recommendation is made by Government and approved by Parliament means that the people will have the final say. That is absolutely as it should be.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): If one gives up all control of interest rates, exchange rates, money supply, national reserves and—through the stability pact—fiscal policy, has not one ceased to be an independent nation state?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong. There is no question of our giving up our ability to make decisions on tax and spending. That is what we do, and will continue to do, through our Budgets. This afternoon we have seen the two sections of the Conservative party: the one, led by the former Chancellor, is for going in almost immediately, and the other is for never going in at all.

The shadow Chancellor and the leader of the Conservative party tried to bridge the gap by saying that entry would take 10 years. On what basis? If it is wrong in principle, why do they not rule it out for 100 years? If it is not wrong in principle but depends on the economic situation, why do they not apply the economic tests exactly as we do? The Conservative party must grow up.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): If one wants to catch a train, is it not prudent to get on that train at the point of departure rather than trying to catch up with it when it is well on its journey? Is it not, and I say this very sadly, an historic mistake not to go in on 1 January 1999? What did John Monks, speaking on behalf of the General Council of the TUC, tell my right hon. Friend?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has been a long-standing supporter of European integration, but I have to tell him that his proposal for 1 January 1999 is not a realistic prospect. Interest rates in Britain are 7 per cent., while on the continent they are 3 per cent. There is no convergence of the economic cycle that could make entry in 1999 possible. We have to make a decision based on the economic tests that we are applying.

[Mr. Brown]

On that basis, it is not a realistic prospect, in our view, to decide to join then, nor is it a realistic prospect to decide to join during the course of this Parliament, barring something unforeseen. I believe that, when he considers those issues—and particularly the Treasury assessment—on all the economic tests, my hon. Friend will agree that 1999 is unrealistic. I think that he will find John Monks and the TUC supportive of the facts that we favour the principle and that we will make proper preparations so that a decision by the country to join can be made at an appropriate time.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does the Chancellor agree that, following the report in the *Financial Times* at the end of September, a false market in shares was created? Does he agree that the principal cause of that was the remarks of an unnamed Minister to the effect that early entry to the single currency was to be anticipated? Given that a false market had been created and could have been dispelled, why did not the Chancellor make his position clear much earlier—or had he not made his mind up?

Mr. Brown: I must refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to the letters from the Bank of England and the Securities and Investments Board on his points about the shares market. On making definitive statements, with the detailed assessment, I have done it, as people would have expected me to do, in very great detail, and I have done it in a statement to this House.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Does the Chancellor agree that the country will welcome what my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) described as an historic decision? It is historic because the principle of entering into a single currency is confirmed and the option of not entering is foreclosed. Does he agree that the City will be pleased to hear that the Government will adhere to the stability pact? The emphasis on preparation and convergence will be important.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that preparation will mean that the time lag between the decision to enter the single currency and actual entry after getting the approval of the people in a referendum will be reduced, so that we can play the part that the Prime Minister has described at the heart of the Europe, influencing European affairs?

Mr. Brown: I am glad that my hon. Friend realises the importance of preparation—something that has been lost on the Conservatives. It is very important that the standing committee that we have set up with the Governor of the Bank of England, the president of the CBI and the Association of British Chambers of Commerce gets to work to look at these issues in great detail and to make recommendations to us. We would be failing in our duty if we did not set up that committee and make preparations now.

My hon. Friend mentioned the importance of the City of London and financial services. It is one of the tests that we are applying on entry to monetary union that jobs in the City and in financial services, which are a rising part of employment in our economy, can be enhanced by a decision to enter.

On the general question of jobs, I believe that our test on jobs is the most important one for the British people. We are pressing right across Europe, through our plans for the special employment summit and other things, for Europe to direct its attention to solving the problems of unemployment.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the Chancellor accept that we in Plaid Cymru see considerable benefit from being in the single currency for industry, agriculture and home owners, always provided that there is a real mechanism to deal with regional discrepancy? There is as great a need to deal with that, both in the UK and in other parts of Europe, as there is to deal with convergence between states in Europe. In his statement, the Chancellor did not refer to dealing with regional disparity. Will he now address it, and accept that we would very much like to have been in the single currency in 1999, as the Irish Republic will be?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his general support of the statement of principle and the practical measures that we are taking for preparation. Unemployment and regional policy are right at the heart of the debate about EMU. If he looks at the Treasury's economic assessment, he will find that the worries about flexibility relate to the ability of regions and parts of the European economy to withstand any shocks that may arise owing to changes in their economic circumstances. It is precisely for those reasons that we must be satisfied that there is an ability to adjust to change within the European economies so that regions cannot and do not lose out at a time of great economic change.

It is most important for Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and other regions of this country that we attack the persistent problems of unemployment and the lack of skills in the economy—it is central to our test for economic and monetary union that progress is made in those areas. Our proposals for education and training, which have come from the Department for Education and Employment—and from the Welsh Office in the case of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley)—and our proposals for reform of the welfare state are vital if we are to put our economy on the right lines.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will my right hon. Friend accept from me that it is not a good idea to catch the first train that leaves the station as it might be run by Branson and get you nowhere? Does he accept that the issue of the Common Market and the European Union has blighted every Government for the past 30 years? He is right to be careful about the progress that is being made at this time. When the previous Government decided to join the exchange rate mechanism last time and we were taken in by the previous Prime Minister but one, wonderful, meticulous preparations had been made. However, notwithstanding that, 16 September 1992 ended in a calamity for Britain—£10 billion was lost, the Prime Minister was locked in a lavatory and the Chancellor of the Exchequer was running about trying to find a portable radio to discover the *Financial Times* index. I hope that that will be etched in my right hon. Friend's memory. Although he is not catching this train, he wants to be careful about catching the next one.

Mr. Brown: It is precisely because of the danger of making economic decisions on political grounds that we are going to be absolutely careful, both about the preparations to make a decision on monetary union and about insisting that the economic tests are met. When my hon. Friend looks at the documentation provided he will see that in relation to the business cycle, flexibility, employment and investment, we must be satisfied that the economic tests that we have set down for both convergence and sustainable monetary union are met. It is part of my job at the Treasury to ensure that.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I wish to question the right hon. Gentleman on convergence, particularly the convergence of interest rates. He has said today that interest rates in this country are more than double those in continental Europe. There clearly needs to be convergence before we can enter and it is also clear that it is fairly unlikely that interest rates on the continent will rise significantly over the intervening period. Is the right hon. Gentleman giving a commitment today that there will be a progressive reduction in British interest rates? Is that his policy as from today? If so, how will he deal with the problems of inflation? Will he reduce public expenditure or increase taxation?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman should understand—I hope that he does not misunderstand this—that there is no weakening of the inflation target. I have said that if we can make a success of our economic reforms, over time I should like to reduce the inflation target. It is precisely because interest rates have diverged—in Britain, to deal with an incipient inflationary problem that we inherited from the previous Government—that it is not realistic either to enter in 1999 or to make a decision to enter by the end of this Parliament. The aspects that the hon. Gentleman mentioned in relation to convergence are not only making progress—our institutional reforms in the Bank of England to get control of inflation and our fiscal deficit reduction plan to get control over public borrowing are essential in the national economic interest. That is the policy that we shall pursue.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Now that the decision has been taken, is my right hon. Friend aware that we must avoid any parallel with the situation 40 years ago, when we failed to become a member of the Community, and accepted disadvantageous conditions on our subsequent entry? I would like to ask one question in particular: how will he deal with the danger of decisions crucial to us being taken against our own national interest?

Mr. Brown: My right hon. Friend, who has taken a great interest in these matters over time, ought to be reassured about two things. First, our statement of principle today—the first statement of principle on a single currency made by a British Government—will send a signal to our continental neighbours that we are serious about the project. Secondly, I am determined that economic decisions are made in the ECOFIN Council—the Council of Finance Ministers—and I will continue to make proposals to ensure that that is the case.

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that we missed opportunities in the past; we must not miss opportunities again, but we must make sure that, in seizing the opportunities available, we are sure that the economic benefits can come to this country and sure that the economic tests that we set down are not passed over to meet an artificial timetable, but are actually met.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): I agree with the Government that popular consent is necessary before we can enter monetary union. Is the Government's commitment to a referendum as the device for securing that popular consent absolute; or is it possible, in the Government's view, that that requirement could be met by getting a mandate in a general election?

Mr. Brown: I said that it was the policy of the Government to put us in a position where a real choice, after preparations had been made, could be made early in the next Parliament. That is based on our assessment of the economic difficulties and the problems of preparation that we must now face. I said that there would be a referendum at that time if the Government made a recommendation and if Parliament so decided.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement. I am delighted that he has placed so much emphasis on participation in a successful monetary union, because it will not be successful. It would be a mistake to rush to buy a non-flying pig in a deflationary poke.

As the attempt to go into monetary union in Europe—even if we are not going to be part of it—will cause uncertainties, what are my right. hon. Friend's plans for these foreseen circumstances? First, there is the uncertainty as to whether or not monetary union takes place. Secondly, there is the uncertainty about whether it is a hard or a soft euro and a wide or narrow monetary union. Thirdly, there is uncertainty created by what amounts to a speculators' charter, like the ERM, once rates are fixed before the euro emerges in 2002. The danger is that all that will bring a flight of funny money from Europe and its uncertainties into the pound to push sterling higher. How can we cope with that?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend should bear it in mind that one of the purposes of a common currency is to avoid systematic currency speculation between 15 or a number of different currencies on the European continent, and that, in the long term, the development of a single currency would work against the speculators and not in their favour. He is right to say that a time is needed to assess how monetary union is working, as well as a time for preparation for Britain. I hope that he will agree that that is what we are doing.

However, I challenge my hon. Friend's analysis that our economic policy in Britain is in any way being imposed by policies from other parts of Europe. The decisions we have made on interest rates and public borrowing are the decisions that are right for Britain. We must get away from a situation in which we have a stop-go economy—where, every time we expand, inflation rises, we have to cut back, and we end up with the boom and bust cycle that caused so much damage during the Conservative years. It is to get away from Conservative instability that we have put in place the policies we have.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): The Chancellor has laboured the points on convergence, and they are obviously important, but does he recognise the concern felt in the Scottish economy about the fact that the interest rate policy being pursued by the Bank of England and the Government is higher than is required by the Scottish economy, which is not experiencing the overheating seen in the economy of the south-east of England?

[Mr. John Swinney]

There would be many economic advantages to exporters and the Scottish business community from earlier entry into a single currency. What would the Chancellor like to say to those in the business community in Scotland to enhance their preparations for the single currency and to give them any more certainty than ever existed when the Conservatives were in power?

Mr. Brown: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman wants separate currencies in the United Kingdom or a single currency in Europe—he is not absolutely clear about what his policy is. However, I can tell him that this Government's policies to tackle the problems of unemployment in Scotland and the problems that cause unemployment, which include the lack of skills in Scotland, and to deal with some of the structural problems of the Scottish economy are the policies that are best suited to getting people in Scotland back to work.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): In stating the criteria very clearly, my right hon. Friend also made the point that it is important that we get it right, rather than that we go in quickly. Will he bear in mind the fact that, for some industries in this country, and some people whose jobs depend on those industries, the prospect of not going in quickly presents great difficulty, because we are labouring under the problems of an overvalued currency and fluctuating interest rates? In getting it right, will he make sure that not too many jobs are lost too quickly as a consequence?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend has an important role in the House as Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, and he is right to draw attention to any difficulties facing industry resulting from the inflation generated by the policies of the previous Government. I am aware that it is more important to get it right than to get it quickly; however, I understand that what people need is a framework within which to plan, and that is why we have made the decisions we have announced today. There will be a time of preparation, followed by a time of decision.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I welcome very much the unambiguous commitment to the referendum given by the Chancellor today. Will he make it abundantly clear that, while preparations are being made for joining in the event of the single currency being a success, he will make comparable proposals and preparations in the event of the single currency turning out to be an almighty disaster—as some of us think it might? Will he bear it in mind that there is a sincerely held and deep-rooted feeling among members of all parties in the House of Commons that a single European state, without democracy and based on a single currency, will inevitably result in mass unemployment, misery and the sort of instability that we saw at the time of the gold standard?

Mr. Brown: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman wants us to make preparations not to join, but I have to tell him that the single currency will affect us whether we are in or out, and it is important that the nation addresses itself to both the difficulties and the opportunities that arise from it. As I said in my statement, only a few days ago Marks and Spencer announced measures that it was taking, and yesterday National Westminster bank announced training measures in respect of the euro. It is not right for Conservative Members to ask us to have our heads in the sand when events are occurring that affect us directly.

As for our policies on the economy, the policies that we are pursuing to tackle inflation, to keep borrowing under control and to create jobs through reform of the welfare state, are right for Britain anyway.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is it not true that, if a hard core of countries proceed with EMU at an early stage—before the United Kingdom does so—the inevitable consequence will be a large volume of euro currency circulating within the United Kingdom before the next general election? Personally, I would welcome that.

Does it not follow that, before the next election and before the referendum, many firms in the United Kingdom may well be paying salaries in euro currency, and perhaps even entering into transactions at retail level? In many ways, the approach adopted by my right hon. Friend, which is based on consensus, will ease the path towards the inevitable decision, which I believe will be in favour.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend makes an important and telling point both about the need to prepare and about the fact that this matter will affect us. It is true that euro notes and coins will be in circulation on 1 January 2002—indeed, it may be earlier than that if certain decisions are made—and, although I cannot say when the next election will be, it is possible that it might be held before or after that date. The fact of the matter is that it affects us; we have to be alert to that fact, and we have to prepare. That shows the wisdom of a new policy from the Government today to make preparations.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): Does not the Chancellor's statement today about active preparations for a single currency in effect mean that the Government have taken a decision to go in? Will the markets not see it as that, and will business men not see it as that? More important, does not the decision today prejudice any referendum that will be held, because the Government will then say, "All the preparations are made; we can't say no now"?

Mr. Brown: I think the hon. Gentleman would acknowledge the importance of the European Union, not just in other areas of the continent, but in Northern Ireland, through the work of the European investment bank and other institutions. But I have to tell him that, if we have a Government—as we do—who support the principle of monetary union, who see no constitutional bar to joining, but who realise that the nation is in many ways ill prepared even to take a final decision on these matters, it is right to make these preparations, and that is what we will do. I repeat to the hon. Gentleman: the European monetary union affects us whether we are in or out, and I would be failing in my duty as Chancellor if we did not make the preparations to deal with that.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): May I suggest to my right hon. Friend that rather greater constitutional issues are involved than perhaps his statement indicates? For example, surely a decision that will lead to imposing public expenditure limits and public borrowing limits on all future British Governments is a constitutional issue. If it is a constitutional issue of such significance, is that not the reason why, rightly, my right hon. Friend and the Government are offering a referendum: because it is not only an economic issue, but a constitutional one, that we put to a referendum?

Mr. Brown: I think that, when my hon. Friend reads my statement in detail, he will see that it says that I accept that there are constitutional implications. What I do not accept is that there is a constitutional bar that outweighs the economic tests as the decisive reason why we might join a single currency. As for his point about public expenditure and taxation, I repeat to him: the measures that we have taken both in the Budget, and in the decisions on other issues around Budget time on public expenditure and everything else, are the measures that are right for Britain. It is right that we follow the fiscal rules that we have set down. These are rules that we set for ourselves.

The decisions that we have taken about inflation and interest rates are also decisions that we have taken for Britain. They are within the terms of the stability pact and within the likely operation of monetary union, and I do not see an inconsistency between pursuing the policies that are right for Europe and the policies of convergence that can make possible a decision on monetary union.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Can the Chancellor tell the House what the constitutional implications are of British membership of economic and monetary union, to which he apparently attaches so little importance?

Mr. Brown: I said—I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will also read my statement—that we are talking about a pooling of economic sovereignty. I do not deny that that is the case. If monetary union takes place, interest rates are set at a European level and there is European action to deal with the problems of inflation, but I do not myself see that that is a bar to monetary union—that there is a constitutional bar to it. Instead, I believe that the economic advantages outweigh the constitutional implications that no doubt the right hon. Gentleman would want to emphasise.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): The Chancellor referred to setting up a committee of the Governor of the Bank of England, the heads of the CBI and TUC and the heads of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce to discuss this issue, but I invite him to go a little further, because we need to decontaminate the whole terrain of European discussion, which has been poisoned by five years of xenophobic anti-Europeanism, of which we have heard no little expression again this afternoon.

I invite my right hon. Friend to look to the regions: in my constituency, great exporting firms such as British Steel and Beatsons Clark will welcome this clear statement of principle. I invite him to look to the universities; to the representatives of all the employees involved in this. They, too, can take part in this discussion and preparation, so that, when the decision comes, we are ready for it, having made up for the ground lost as a result of the anti-European hostilities of the Conservative party.

Mr. Brown: One of the problems with what happened during the time in office of the previous Government was that, not only were no preparations made to the necessary level, but no information was flowing about the practical implications of monetary union. As my hon. Friend may know, during the summer we published a pamphlet on the pros and cons of monetary union for business. We published a major study on that, and set up a business advisory committee.

Today I have announced that there will be regional conferences for my hon. Friend's region, for Northern Ireland, for Scotland and for Wales, in which the practical implications of monetary union can be discussed. I believe that that is the responsible way to proceed.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): What the Chancellor has said today is dramatically different from that which appeared on 26 September in the *Financial Times*. I should like to know why the Chancellor did not contradict it at the time, if Government policy was as described today. I should like to know that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister realise that they have lost the confidence of the financial community that they have been talking about, not just in London but elsewhere, and I should like the Chancellor to assure the House that, on matters as serious as this, leaks of the sort that we have had this summer will cease.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman should note that I have come to the House at the earliest available opportunity. I have made a detailed statement, and published the Treasury assessment. I would say to him that none of that detailed assessment published by the Treasury appeared in any newspaper before we came to the House.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend will know that most industrialists in a constituency such as mine believe that it is essential that we should get into the single currency as soon as possible. They recognise that 1 January 1999 is impossible because of the failures of the previous Government. The commitment that has been given today now needs a commitment from those industries that invest and keep jobs in this country, because I believe that it is an important commitment on both sides and will benefit places such as Burnley, and the whole of the country, in the years ahead.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because he reflects the views of industry and business in this country that Britain should not be left behind on vital issues of principle affecting the future of our economy. It is for these reasons that the preparations will start, it is for these reasons that there is a consultative committee with business, and it is for these reasons that the standing committee has been set up.

The Conservatives' failure to say that the test of monetary union will be the economic benefits—indeed, their view that, even if benefits could be proven for monetary union, they would still be against it—shows that they are now the anti-business party in Britain.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Given the right hon. Gentleman's comments on strengthening employment and improving the competitive situation, will the Chancellor of the Exchequer now advise the House to reject the employment chapter of the Amsterdam treaty, and will he inform the House whether he consulted the Governor of the Bank of England before briefing *The Times* on 18 October?

Mr. Brown: I am in regular contact with the Governor of the Bank of England about many issues. As far as the

[Mr. Brown]

employment chapter of the Amsterdam treaty is concerned, we take some pride in the fact that employment issues have become central to the discussions of the European Union.

I still have not heard an answer to the question whether the Conservative party still wants a referendum on the Amsterdam treaty—one of the other proposals that came from the leader of the Conservative party.

As far as employment is concerned, the British Government are leading in Europe in making issues related to employment, and skills and education for employment, central to the European agenda; that is absolutely right.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement, which I warmly welcome, and on his clear rejection of the Luddite economics of the Conservative party. Is it not a matter of plain common sense that any decision on the part of the British Government to join a single currency should be based on the economic evidence that prevails at the time, not on the basis of any arbitrary timetable, which now appears to be Conservative party policy?

Mr. Brown: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. It is now Conservative party policy that the Conservatives will not join a single currency or consider it for two Parliaments. They have been unable to explain, since the excitement of their get-together at Eastbourne, why they have retreated from their previous view that they would not enter in the foreseeable future, and suddenly it became 10 years. Indeed, the retreat to Eastbourne became the Eastbourne retreat on policy as a result of what they had decided.

It is economic logic that will take the decision as far as the Government are concerned, and until the Conservatives make up their minds whether they support the single currency on principle, they are like people without a route map, and they will inevitably get lost.

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Is the Chancellor of the Exchequer aware that his whole-hearted commitment, and that of the Government, to a single currency is extremely welcome, and that it will be widely welcomed by industry and by finance in this country, by Europeans, and by all those who have invested here from outside?

On the other hand, the right hon. Gentleman's refusal to accept the single currency immediately and to become one of the first members participating in it is bitterly disappointing. He and the Government will lose all influence in the European Union in all financial questions and in everything concerned with the single currency—he cannot expect or hope for any influence. That means that the other countries that are debating it and settling it will have their own way. What is more, there will be a general loss of respect for the British among all the other member countries because the right hon. Gentleman has decided to take no action.

Secondly, is the Chancellor aware that he will now find it extremely difficult to keep up the pressure in the way he claims to desire? I cannot have much confidence in a committee that contains the Governor of the Bank of England, who said at the IMF Hong Kong conference, "Why is everybody in a hurry?" That does not seem to be a sign of someone working towards the end which the Chancellor himself wants.

I am one of those who was here in 1950, and I cannot banish from my mind the recollection of the ghastly blunder made by Mr. Attlee and his Chancellor of the Exchequer when they refused to have anything to do with the initial negotiations over the Coal and Steel Community. The result was that we were left outside all the institutions for 22 years, until I signed the treaties in Brussels in 1972. During those 22 wasted years, we had not a scrap of influence. *[Interruption.]* I quite understand the attitude of my colleagues who say that we should never have joined at all—because they have lost the day.

The Chancellor should also bear in mind the fact that a perfect match of economies will never be achieved outside the single currency; it will come only when countries are inside the currency. That will force them to take the measures necessary to bring about the unity which the Chancellor rightly requires.

Mr. Brown: Despite some of his comments, I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for continuing to argue the case in principle for monetary union over many years. We are agreed that monetary union is a good thing in principle if its economic benefits can be proven. We are further agreed that there is no constitutional bar to joining; and the right hon. Gentleman would agree that it would be wrong of the Government to put their head in the sand, and that we should make proper preparations so that we can reach the point of decision.

I would part company with the right hon. Gentleman in that I do not think it right for the Government to join without being sure that the economic benefits to the British economy can be shown to be obvious. We must pass the necessary economic tests before locking ourselves into what will be a major change in the way our economy works. The tests that we have set—on convergence, flexibility and the effect on jobs—would have to be met before it would be responsible to argue that we should definitively go in.

The Europeans will be pleased that we have made this statement of principle. It was the right thing to do. They will also be pleased that we have removed any constitutional bar to joining and that we are making preparations. The right hon. Gentleman will agree, on reflection, that it is right to have the Bank of England represented on a committee looking at euro coins and euro notes. The Europeans will be happy that we are making active preparations to join.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Thank you. We shall now move on—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I am sure that we will return to this question, but Members must understand that it is quite impossible to call everyone who has an interest. We have had a good exchange of views in the past hour and a half.

Points of Order

5.3 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I think you know that I tabled an application under Standing Order No. 24 to adjourn the House so as to enable it to debate the fact that the Government are gagging Euro Members on matters of major constitutional importance. Your Secretary informed me that you had decided not to allow me to move that application. I told your Secretary that that power was not obvious in the text of the Standing Order. Indeed, the Standing Orders were redrafted in March of this year.

Your Secretary, Madam Speaker, was good enough to refer me to the statement that your predecessor made in 1991, when he held that the Speaker had a power not to allow such applications even though that was not apparent in the text of the Standing Order.

You will appreciate, Madam Speaker, that there have been many occasions when the Government have made announcements outside the House; and I am sure that you would not wish to prevent Back Benchers from raising issues of constitutional importance. You will also be aware that the Procedure Committee, at the end of the 1980s, did not wish to give the Speaker the power that your predecessor asserted existed.

In these circumstances, will you look again, Madam Speaker, at your predecessor's ruling, to determine whether it is still appropriate? If you decide that it still is, can you suggest to those who draft the Standing Orders that the fact that you have such a power should be apparent in the Standing Orders themselves?

Madam Speaker: In the first place, it is not the procedure of this House that any hon. Member who has made an application to me under Standing Order No. 24 should raise it on the Floor of the House. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is an experienced Member and former Minister, and I would have expected him to understand the procedures of the House.

Secondly, it is not incumbent upon the right hon. and learned Gentleman to repeat a conversation that took place between my office and him. My office tries to assist hon. Members, and I deprecate the repetition of such conversations on the Floor of the House.

I have no wish to embarrass the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but I have to tell him that his Standing Order No. 24 application did not even reach first base. If he considers that an issue of parliamentary privilege or contempt has arisen, he should write to me, and I will then consider the matter. Apart from that, I see nothing in what he is saying that should properly engage the Speaker of this House.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It relates to the freedom of Members of this House, and I should be grateful for your ruling.

When my party was in government, I noted that hon. Members from both sides of the House went around planting oral questions—a practice you and I both deprecate. You can therefore imagine my surprise when, this afternoon in the Table Office, I was given a question by the Member who I believe to be the parliamentary private secretary to the Minister without Portfolio, who asked me to raise this planted question with that very Minister. Will you rule that asking Opposition or Government Members to raise planted questions is quite improper?

Madam Speaker: I would have looked forward enormously not just to the question but to the hon. Gentleman's supplementary, because that is when the knife goes in. I am sure that Ministers will have learnt their lesson.

Defence Policy

Relevant documents: Minutes of Evidence taken before the Defence Committee on 29th July (Gulf War Illnesses), HC 222-i, and 30th July (Strategic Defence Review), HC 138-i, and the First Special Report from the Defence Committee (Government Replies to First to Sixth Reports of Session 1996–97: HC 94 (Sale of the Married Quarters Estate), HC 211 (The Army Terms of Service (Amendment) Regulations (S.I., 1996 No. 2973)), HC 142 (Defence Medical Services), HC 127 (Defence Spending), HC 233 (Heavy Lift) and HC 158 (Gulf War Illnesses: Latest Developments)), HC 153.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

5.7 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Robertson): It is a great honour to address the House in my first defence debate as Secretary of State for Defence.

Our armed forces and the civil servants and other civilians who support them are a great credit to our country. Wherever they are called upon to serve in the world, from the Falklands to Bosnia, from Iraq to Northern Ireland—and many other places, too—they earn the respect of those whom they are called upon to defend. They perform a difficult and often dangerous task with great distinction, and it is my privilege to pay tribute to them today.

Those brave men and women are now participating in our strategic defence review, which is the central part of the Government's defence policy. When I launched the review at the end of May, I said that I wanted it to be open and inclusive, unlike the secretive and often partial reviews of the recent past.

I firmly believe that there is a consensus on defence in the British nation, and I want the review to reflect it. The British people are tired of petty squabbling by politicians over important national matters where little real division exists. My confidence that such a consensus exists has led me to embark on an unprecedented amount of consultation in this review. I am sure that it will be possible to establish a wide base of support for the conclusions that the review will eventually reach.

The consultation process has a number of strands. First and most important, we are holding this two-day debate in the House so that hon. Members can give their views on the priorities that Britain should set for its security policy and armed forces. My Ministers and I will listen with great care to what is said during the debate. Secondly, in the run-up to the debate, the Foreign Secretary and I held two open seminars attended by the principal Opposition spokespeople and others, and I shall hold a third seminar shortly. Thirdly, I invited anyone with an interest to submit his or her views in writing, and so far we have received more than 450 contributions. Of those, some 370 authors have given permission for their contributions to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses, where they are now available for reference. Another consultation with a panel of individuals, both expert and non-expert in defence matters, and with the armed forces, is also in hand.

In addition to what I say today, I outlined the Government's thinking in recent speeches that I made to the English Speaking Union and the Royal United Services Institute, and those will be available in the Libraries of the House.

All that is in stark contrast to the methods used by Governments in the recent past. This review is different: we are consulting, so let no one say that they have not had a chance to express their view in this open review process. We have listened to many people in the past five and a half months, and I shall now outline some of the Government's views on our security priorities.

We believe that the British are by inclination internationalist, not isolationist. When the British people voted new Labour on 1 May, they did so in part because they trusted us to represent them in the great councils of the world. The British people also trusted new Labour because they believed that we would protect and improve the tools that underpin Britain's place in the world, particularly our armed forces, which are held in such high regard abroad. We will not betray the trust of the British people.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): In that case, why did not the video of new Britain shown to Commonwealth leaders at the Edinburgh summit mention Her Majesty's forces?

Mr. Robertson: If the hon. Gentleman is as obsessed as some of his colleagues seem to be with those videos, he will realise that the Commonwealth is not an institution with a defence dimension. Perhaps he suggests that it should have one. The Government's commitment to our armed forces and the job that they do is beyond question.

Just as we are determined to play a positive and active role within the European Union, so we shall play a leading role in NATO and the United Nations. The transatlantic link remains vital to our defence and our country, so we can and will be involved in the world. We shall not stand aside from the new threats and problems that face the international community because that is not our way. We intend to be persuaders for our values and points of view. Britain will continue to be a force for good in the world.

Such a role, however, carries obligations. If we are to discharge them properly, we must have well-equipped, modern, capable armed forces, able to counter the problems that we are likely to encounter in the 21st century. The Opposition patently missed that vital point in all their long years in government.

The world has changed fundamentally in the past 10 years. The fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Warsaw pact removed the monolithic threat facing the peoples of Europe. The end of that terrible confrontation is greatly to be welcomed, but it has left problems in its wake. Other tensions, sometimes long submerged, have been able to surface now that the super-power confrontation has been dissolved.

I remember calling that new and complex picture a "bonfire of the certainties". The world is now a much more complex and confusing place. However, some people continue to say, "Who is the enemy now that the Warsaw pact has gone?" I have a clear answer for them: the enemy is the instability that can threaten the peace and prosperity that we now enjoy. Only last week, we saw an influx of migrants, of refugees to this country from Slovakia, which created a great stir in Britain. Just imagine the population migrations that could result if the economies of central and eastern Europe failed in their brave reform programmes.

Ethnic disputes, such as that in the former Yugoslavia, and territorial ambitions such as those displayed by Saddam Hussein, have caused major conflicts in the

1990s. Other problems exist as well. Religious tensions, the competition for scarce resources, including water, and the new security challenges posed by the drugs trade, organised crime and terrorism must all be dealt with.

The previous Government sadly failed to recognise that agenda. The armed forces inherited by this Government are doing difficult jobs extremely well in very demanding circumstances, but they were subjected to a series of savage and arbitrary cuts, which shocked the British people as they became widely known.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): If those essential commitments demand extra spending, will the Government provide it? If not, how can this be called a review? Is not it just a cost-cutting exercise?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman asks whether we shall increase spending, then implies, by answering his own question, that we shall cut expenditure. There are demanding commitments and holes in capabilities, which I shall outline. We shall have to rethink priorities inside the Ministry of Defence. I do not think that the Conservative party suggests that we increase defence expenditure—it would be bizarre if it did, given that it cut £9 billion from the defence budget in the past nine years. The hon. Gentleman would be wise not to go on about expenditure cuts but to stay silent and listen to the catalogue that we were left to deal with and the problems that we must face.

Since the mid-1980s, under the Conservative Government—Mrs. Thatcher's Administration—defence expenditure in the United Kingdom has declined by 29 per cent. in real terms. It now stands at 2.7 per cent. of gross domestic product—the lowest level since 1934. That is an interesting date for Conservative Members to ruminate on for a moment.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: I shall come to the hon. Gentleman's insider knowledge in a moment, but let me remind him what the Conservative Administration were doing, so that the House has a full picture of what we inherited.

Since 1990—the year after the Berlin wall collapsed—the strength of our armed forces has been reduced from 315,000 to 215,000. That is 100,000 out of our armed forces and a fall of some 32 per cent. The number of conventionally armed submarines has fallen from 28 to 12. The fleet of destroyers and frigates in the Royal Navy has been reduced from 48 to 35. The number of infantry battalions in the British Army has been reduced from 55 to 40, while the number of tanks is down by some 45 per cent. and the number of aircraft in service with the Royal Air Force has fallen by more than 30 per cent. That is what the Conservative Government did between 1990 and 1997. Would Conservative Members like to speculate on what they would have said if a Labour Government had done that?

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): In the light of the reductions and the possibility that we shall continue to try to keep a small number in regular service, will the Secretary of State give a commitment that that which has been at the heart of our nation—the volunteer aspect—will be maintained in the future and not whittled down further? In particular, will he give a commitment to maintain defence medical services as a front-line rather than rear-line operation?

Mr. Robertson: A strategic defence review that came up with all the answers in advance and protected every area that people felt to be precious would not be a strategic defence review. Indeed, a mistake made by at least one Conservative Administration was to call a pre-established list of cuts in one service a defence review. All the options will be given careful consideration, to see what is in the best interests of the effectiveness of our armed forces and what is required for our country. I shall speak briefly about the defence medical services later, and my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces will deal with the matter at greater length tomorrow on the second day of the debate.

Mr. Keith Simpson: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman will get his moment of glory when I choose.

I appreciate that reductions in the front line were justified by the new strategic circumstances, but arbitrary cuts elsewhere have left serious holes in the capabilities of our armed forces, and we must put them right. Those mistakes must be rectified. We are determined to refashion Britain's defences to produce the flexible, modern, high-capability, mobile forces that we shall need to meet the new challenges. I shall say a little more about our thinking on those issues in a moment.

We are determined to create modern, strong defences, but make no mistake about it, that commitment is not a blank cheque for the Ministry of Defence. Obtaining greater efficiency from defence spending is a central part of the strategic defence review. I am committed to ensuring that every pound spent by the Ministry of Defence is necessary for our country's defence and security, so I have instructed my staff to look at all aspects of the way in which we support and equip the front line, to make sure that defence capability is delivered as cost-effectively as possible.

In that connection, perhaps I should say a word about the so-called fine that was levied on the Ministry of Defence recently. Contrary to the impression given by some newspapers, the deduction of £168 million from this year's budget occurred because of an overspend in the previous financial year, which ended a month before we came to office. According to long-established practice, such overspends are clawed back from the following year's budget, as the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), a former Treasury Minister, will know only too well. As in so many other cases, that fine is a legacy of the previous Government, which we shall have to bear. It is one more reason why I must push to produce ever greater efficiency at the MOD.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. So the £168 million fine has been taken on the chin by his Department. Can he tell us where the money will be found from within this year's Ministry of Defence spending budget?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman should have a word with the Ministers in the previous Government who

[Mr. Robertson]

were responsible for the overspend. It had nothing to do with me or other Ministers now on the Front Bench. The hon. Gentleman will discover that a large part of the reason for the overspend was that bills that should have been paid in the current financial year were paid in the previous financial year. Clearly, if they were paid in advance, they will not be paid this year. We shall keep to the spending plans that were already laid down for 1997 and for 1998 and 1999, but spending will have to be reduced to accommodate the fine.

That is one of the legacies that we inherited. We must also live with the so-called efficiency savings of 3 per cent. that we inherited from the previous Government. That is one of the results of what they put in place. I have explained what that was and the effect that it will have.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate) *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: No, the matter has been effectively dealt with.

We shall put pressure on resources and on efficiency not just because that is right, but because we need to free resources inside the Ministry to tackle the legacy of problems left to us by the previous Government. I shall not detain the House with an exhaustive list of problems, but let me highlight a few examples.

First, there has been a series of spares shortfalls with our Challenger 1 tanks and Tornado F3 aircraft. Secondly, we cannot transport some of our major battle-winning equipment by air. Thirdly, our defence medical services, as the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) observed, have serious personnel and equipment shortfalls and reduced morale as a consequence.

The problems that we have inherited are not restricted to equipment. The armed forces are chronically short of personnel. As well as a shortage of well over 4,000 regular soldiers, there are widespread shortages of specialists such as logistics experts and signals personnel. As a result, many of our troops have to spend much longer periods in high-stress postings such as Northern Ireland and Bosnia than is officially recommended.

For example, more than 1,000 soldiers were deployed to Bosnia last year within six months of completing a previous operational tour. Some of them had only three weeks in the United Kingdom between serving in the Falklands and moving on to service in Bosnia. Small wonder, then, that we have difficulty in recruiting and especially in retaining personnel. It is a remarkable tribute to those people and their families that they take the strain of those problems with so little complaint.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I share the Secretary of State's admiration for the way in which the families and the service men coped with those difficulties. Does he accept, however, that for many young people joining the armed forces, the prospect of operations, the training for real operations and going on operations make it such an attractive career? That unique aspect of a career in the armed forces must be balanced with the requirement, as people get older, to allow them to spend more time with their families. I have every sympathy with the right hon. Gentleman as he wrestles with the problem.

Mr. Robertson: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's contribution. He had long experience in the MOD. The shortfall of troops is a deep and serious problem with which he tried to deal, even if unsuccessfully. Although many of the people in our armed forces enjoy the operations in which they take part and the challenge that they face, the pressure on their family lives—a critically important part of morale and their effectiveness—increases all the time. When I was in Split in Croatia last Monday, I listened with dismay to some of the personal problems that had been created by overstretch, which must be dealt with not simply on the ground of military effectiveness, but on the ground of pure humanity.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My right hon. Friend and his Minister of State know very well the problems of those in Bosnia who are based at Fallingbostel or elsewhere in the Rhine Army with regard to local allowances. Is there any way in which the cut in local allowances can be reconsidered?

Mr. Robertson: We have examined the matter and I listened carefully to the complaints that were made. The local allowances paid in Germany are designed specifically to compensate for the very high cost of living in that country. Personnel who move to other theatres do not experience such a high cost of living. That is why the allowances are adapted to take account of the circumstances.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): On the issue of morale and discipline, may I say with what I hope is characteristic diffidence that I sincerely hope that Major Eric Joyce will not face a court martial on the charge of conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline? As someone who served in the ranks of the British Army, if only for two years, may I tell my right hon. Friend that I have great sympathy for some of the observations that Major Joyce has made about the class-ridden nature of the British Army and the racial and sexual discrimination that many young soldiers have experienced in recent days?

Mr. Robertson: I recall that my hon. Friend served in the military police, so he will know a little about discipline in the armed forces. He, more than most, will know that Queen's regulations clearly state that serving members of the armed forces should not comment publicly on issues of public sensitivity or take an active part in party political issues. Therefore, Major Joyce's activities were directly a matter for the Army and not for Ministers. Whatever Major Joyce may have said, the issue is the conduct of individuals in the armed forces. It is for Ministers to be involved in politics when there is a change of Government. I have chosen my words with great caution because that is a matter for the Army, and not for Ministers.

I promised to give way to the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson). If he can remember his point, I shall do so now.

Mr. Keith Simpson: Mr. Secretary of State, that is very generous of you. In the spirit of consensus, I return you to the crucial central issue of the strategic defence review—the budget—to which you have referred. I ask—through the Chair—whether you accept the results of a survey published in *The Observer* just after the general election. In a survey of Labour Back-Bench Members, some 80 per cent. urged that there be major reductions in defence expenditure and that those funds be transferred to other areas of priority upon which Labour fought the election. How does the Secretary of State square his statement—that there will be no cuts in defence expenditure—with the opinion of most of his hon. Friends, while continuing to claim that there are many things wrong with the Ministry of Defence? I do not agree with those Labour Members, but no doubt their views are strongly held.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am all for cordiality of exchanges in the House, but they must be accompanied by a degree of formality in addressing remarks through the Chair.

Mr. Robertson: It is clear that the hon. Gentleman has greater expertise on defence expenditure than on addressing the rules of the House. However, I make no pedantry about that.

Labour was elected, in no small part, on our pledge to maintain the strong convention of defence of this country, and to conduct a strategic defence review that would create a balance between what the country wants, needs and is able to do and how best to achieve that. We are embarking upon such a review. We know—as does the hon. Gentleman—about the legacy of economic failure that we inherited from the previous Government and how difficult circumstances are. That is why there are so few Conservative Members of Parliament.

I am determined to get full value from the existing defence budget. I am determined to ensure that our troops are equipped in the best manner possible and to increase service morale. In that way, we shall ensure that they are able to do what the country asks of them. That is precisely why we are establishing the Government's foreign policy priorities before trying to establish the country's needs.

My criticisms regarding the capability holes that we inherited from the previous Government were not intended to score party political points. Many of those criticisms were expressed by the previous Select Committee on Defence, which had an in-built Conservative majority. Its reports were laid on the Table of the House for hon. Members to read. I point them up in order to illustrate the size of the task facing us in creating armed forces that are capable of meeting the challenges of the next century.

To those who claim that the review is not needed and that the armed forces have had to withstand enough change, I say that they should look at the problems and understand the different challenges that the forces will have to meet. They must then agree that we must act to ensure that our defences are strong. We should not have change for change's sake, but we need change if we are not to become a paper tiger. If we are to modernise our armed forces properly, we must also bring our personnel policies up to date.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: I have given way enough today. Many hon. Members wish to participate in the debate, and I must make more progress before I indulge in further generosity to Conservative Members.

The armed forces must represent the society that they defend if they are not to become isolated from it. That is why I am announcing today the quantum change in the number of posts open to women in the British Army. I have decided that, with the present exception of the infantry, the Household Cavalry and the Royal Armoured Corps, all jobs in the Regular Army should now be open to women. That will increase the percentage of Regular Army posts currently open to women from 47 per cent. to 70 per cent.

Women already make a substantial contribution in many areas of the Army and, from 1 April next year, they will also be able to serve in all posts in the Royal Artillery, the Royal Engineers and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. This decision follows a comprehensive review of policy on the employment of women in the Army, and I have ordered an investigation as to whether opportunities for women across the armed forces can be expanded still further. The results of that work will depend, in part, upon the introduction of appropriate gender-free physical selection tests and a full investigation of any potential impact on combat effectiveness that the introduction of women to forward units could cause.

That is another step in fulfilling our promise to modernise the armed forces. We have already launched initiatives to improve access for members of ethnic minorities. Our initiative won plaudits last week from Britain's leading black newspaper, *The Voice*. Commenting on the Army's launch earlier this month of its revised equal opportunities strategy, the newspaper said:

> "If last week's announcement is anything to go by, the Ministry of Defence is certainly going the right way about putting its house in order".

I am personally committed to ensuring that access to the armed forces, and promotion thereafter, is based firmly on merit rather than determined in any way by social class.

We have also made it clear that the issue of homosexuality in the armed forces will be the subject of a free vote during this Parliament. The Government will advance proposals on that subject, having taken into account, among other things, the views of the armed forces and the European courts on the matter.

I shall also say something about another pledge that we intend to redeem. In meeting the needs of our armed forces, the Ministry of Defence and the British defence industry have invested heavily in advanced technologies. We intend to make the best use of the skills and technologies that have been acquired, by spreading the technological processes and skills developed for defence into new civil markets through a defence diversification agency. Such links will strengthen the country's industrial base and contribute to improving Britain's economic performance. We are, therefore, examining how we can build upon the activities of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, DERA, in encouraging the wider exploitation of defence technology.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: I shall give the former special advisers one last chance perhaps to parade their knowledge in this area.

Mr. Blunt: I am afraid that I must return the right hon. Gentleman to his earlier comments when I tried to

[Mr. Blunt]

intervene. He used the term paper tiger. I recall that the same term was used four years ago by his predecessor, who issued a warning to the Treasury about what was happening to Britain's armed forces as a result of defence expenditure levels at that stage. That resulted in a welcome commitment to the front-line strength of the armed forces at that time and in the exercise "Front Line First", which reinvested £250 million in the front-line strength of the armed forces. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that his use today of the term paper tiger means that he and his Ministers will stand firm, on behalf of our armed forces, in the face of Treasury pressure?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman, who was a special adviser to a Conservative Secretary of State before the election, has the brass neck to lecture me about fighting the Treasury when the Conservative Government took defence expenditure as a proportion of GDP from 5.2 per cent. in 1985 to 2.7 per cent this year. The hon. Gentleman shows quite remarkable and blatant cheek. He should read the reports of the Select Committee, which had a Conservative majority in the previous Parliament, on the capability not only in the front line, but in the essential back-up for our armed forces. This new Labour Government intend to ensure that our armed forces have the relevant back-up that they require—which is more than the hon. Gentleman's Government did.

Mr. Blunt *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman had his second chance in the election.

Work is now in hand on developing our proposals on diversification. We hope to publish a Green Paper next month and I hope that all those with interests in the subject will contribute to the consultation exercise, so that we can achieve a measure of consensus on the way ahead before final decisions are taken.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the splendid way in which he is dealing with defence provision for our country, In his review, will he comment on the future of the Territorial Army? Is that subject included in the review?

Mr. Robertson: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments. Of course, the matter that he raises will be centrally addressed in the strategic defence review. The role of the Territorial Army and the other reserve forces is of enormous interest. I cannot predict the outcome of the review, but when I have met reserve forces serving in many parts of the world—including in Bosnia last week—I have underlined the value that they add to our armed forces.

The Government have also promised action to tackle the scourge of anti-personnel land mines. We have kept our promise—and in the early days of this Government—to ban the export, import, transfer or manufacture of those land mines. In the weeks since, we have successfully pushed for the Ottawa treaty, which will be signed in December. That will be a big step towards ridding the world of those dreadful weapons.

Last week, in Bosnia, I announced a five-point plan to increase the contribution that the Army makes to humanitarian de-mining. That includes the creation of a mine information and training centre at Minley in Surrey and the establishment of a new military post within my Department to lead a Ministry of Defence co-ordination group on humanitarian de-mining.

My five-point plan will make a good start and I am confident that, together with the increase in resources for mine clearance announced recently by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, it will ensure that the Government play an honourable part in tackling this modern and dreadful scourge. Those redeemed pledges build on the record of success that we have achieved since we came to power a mere six months ago.

On the international stage, we have provided the strong leadership that Britain deserves. At the Madrid summit, we made sensible and successful progress on the enlargement of NATO. At the Amsterdam summit, we retained our national veto on defence while securing the explicit recognition, written into the treaty for the first time, that NATO is the foundation of our and our allies' common defence. In July, in the Bosnian town of Prijedor, British troops serving with the stabilisation force acted decisively to bring people indicted for war crimes to justice. It is all part of our plan: we promised strong defence and we keep our promises.

We said that we would retain Trident. We have kept that promise. The recent Trident missile bodies order reinforces our commitment to credible but minimum deterrence. At the same time, we are injecting a new sense of urgency into international disarmament negotiations. That will be followed up by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. I shall be travelling to Moscow next Monday to talk to my counterpart, General Sergeyev, and we are determined to build better relations with Russia. As part of our manifesto commitment, the defence review is also looking at all aspects of our nuclear posture, including the number of warheads carried by the Trident submarines, to ensure that our deterrent is kept to the minimum yet credible level.

Beyond our manifesto commitments, we have provided additional cash for the Government's medical assessment programme for Gulf war veterans, and I am proud to say that we have more than doubled the amount that the previous Government planned to spend on research into ill health among Gulf war veterans. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces will deal with that matter in greater detail tomorrow.

The biggest and most central promise that we made in our manifesto was to hold a strategic defence review. I am now even more convinced that we were right to make that commitment. It has become increasingly clear to me that the criticisms we made in opposition were not only telling, but, if anything, understated. It was only through the overworked dedication of our forces, which had to get used to having to make do and mend, that we averted serious problems in the Gulf war and Bosnia. It is now our task to put that right.

Thankfully, we are no longer likely to face the same sort of all-out war in Europe which consumed our resources in the half-century up to the collapse of the Berlin wall. Yet paradoxically, now that the huge threat has gone, the newly emerging tensions may mean that our forces will be more likely to have to fight in defence of British interests in a wide variety of places. It is no coincidence that Britain has been involved in two major conflicts in the 1990s—in Bosnia and in the Gulf.

Of course, Britain's interests do not extend equally everywhere. Our assessment is that we are likely to be most directly involved in such problems in Europe, the Gulf or the Mediterranean, where our economic and security interests are most closely engaged. It is those interests and obligations that should primarily determine the size and shape of our armed forces. However, Britain also has wider security interests that could lead to us contributing to coalition operations and humanitarian missions elsewhere.

To achieve all of that change, we shall have to give our armed forces the ships and aircraft that they will need to transport their equipment to areas of tension. They will need the spares, ammunition and back-up support to work when they arrive and they will need reliable equipment if they are to fight. We shall also have to fix the sorry catalogue of problems left for us by the Conservative Government.

We shall reach out to the countries of central and eastern Europe, to work to extend to the newly emerging democracies the security that we have so long enjoyed in the west. I believe that defence has a substantial role to play here too, by positively engaging the militaries of Russia and the Ukraine, to show them how professional armed forces can operate happily under effective civilian control. In bilateral work and through NATO and the United Nations, we can ease the fears of other countries, to prevent them slipping into hostility once more.

Closer work with our former adversaries will make us friends and achieve a disarmament of the mind which is every bit as valuable as an international treaty. We must use the tools of preventive diplomacy and co-operation over development to help to eliminate problems before they occur. We are now looking for new ways to engage with our former adversaries, many of which will involve a positive role for our armed forces. This work I call defence diplomacy and I intend to make it a major theme coming out of the defence review.

We clearly have a substantial task ahead, especially as, in the current climate, we cannot expect any increased funding in real terms for the armed forces, given the other priorities that the Government must meet. Accordingly, we shall have to improve efficiency, release surplus assets and make hard choices about priorities if we are to release funds for the necessary modernisation of our forces. That is one of the reasons why we cancelled the previous Government's plans to spend £60 million on a replacement for Britannia.

That will be the task of the next stage of the review, and doubtless there will be screams from some vested interests as all the options are explored. But be in no doubt, I am determined to ensure that within the very limited resources budgeted for by the previous Government, whose plans we inherited, nothing is wasted within the Ministry of Defence.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: Hon. Members would be very unpopular with their colleagues were they to prolong my speech. I intend to move swiftly towards a conclusion.

I make the point that we have these difficulties, and we have to live within them. They were created by the previous Government, and we shall do our best with what we have. It is my duty to eliminate duplication and to cut waste, to look carefully at all the functions of the Ministry of Defence and its agencies to determine whether they are strictly necessary, and to make the tough choices that my predecessors shirked. I owe it to the armed forces, to the Government and, indeed, to the British people, to free up those resources, to ensure that I deliver our manifesto pledge of strong defences that are genuinely capable of fighting in the modern world. I promise the British people and the House that I for one will not duck that challenge.

5.50 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Let me begin by agreeing with the Secretary of State: our armed forces have had a good summer. The Army has helped to keep the peace in Bosnia, arresting suspected war criminals. The RAF has been enforcing the air exclusion zone over northern Iraq, and our Navy has brought aid to the stricken island of Montserrat—but three varied examples of the tasks that we expect of our armed forces today. They remain a respected, disciplined, professional force. They discharge their duties, defend our country and keep the peace with courage, humanity and efficiency. We owe them an enormous debt. The video that was shown at the Commonwealth conference, which was about Britain, not the Commonwealth, might have found a few minutes to reflect on the role of our armed forces.

While the armed forces have had a good summer, their Secretary of State has not. He lost his battle to replace Britannia, meekly watching while other Ministers left their footprints all over his flower beds; he has seen his budget targeted for a fine of £168 million; his strategic defence review has been hijacked by the Treasury, which is now firmly ensconced in the pilot seat. As a result, his strategy of building a consensus on defence is already in disarray. Morale in his Department is falling, which in turn will have an impact on the all-important question of recruitment.

Like the Secretary of State, I pay tribute to the role of women in the armed forces. I give a cautious welcome to his initiative to recruit more women into the armed forces. Nothing should be done that prejudices the operational efficiency of the armed forces. It remains to be seen exactly how big will be the impact on recruitment of the initiative announced this afternoon.

Mr. Soames: I warmly endorse what my right hon. Friend has said but ask him to seek confirmation from the Secretary of State that the best people to judge the operational effectiveness of additional women joining the armed forces are the armed forces themselves. Decisions should not be made by politicians in some form of modern social engineering.

Sir George Young: I endorse that and hope that the Minister for the Armed Forces, who will be winding up tonight, will do the same.

In the time available, I want to focus mainly on the strategic defence review, NATO enlargement and Bosnia. I know that my hon. Friends will deal with some of the key issues that I omit. I shall begin with the strategic defence review. That was dreamed up by Labour

[Sir George Young]

Members not so much to secure a policy after the election, but to avoid having one before it. When it was set up, we were told that it would be foreign policy led, to establish Britain's security needs and the tasks for the armed forces for the 21st century.

The press notice announcing the review hardly mentioned resources at all. It has been the Secretary of State's blind spot throughout the summer. His speech to RUSI, only last month, gave no hint that there would be any resource constraints on this policy-driven exercise. Money was not mentioned. Indeed, at the Ministry of Defence seminar in July, which I attended, a number of people, including myself, questioned the role of the Treasury, but all reference by contributors to resources has been airbrushed out of the minutes. Yet before the review is half way through, his Department has had to bear the brunt of the Government's failure to meet their manifesto commitment on health within the cash limits to which they had committed themselves.

We were told that the Secretary of State has been fined because his Department overspent. Will the national health service be fined this year if it overspends? Did any other Government Department overspend last year and was not fined? What was the precise reason for the fine? Did the Secretary of State resist it, or did he simply roll over and accept it? Or did he resist it and was simply defeated in a battle with the Treasury? He owes it to the House to respond to the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) and tell the House where that £168 million reduction will fall. Was the Secretary of State aware of the cut in his budget before his speech to RUSI, in which he said that the forces were overstretched?

The key point is that the Secretary of State's strategic expense review is no longer about his Department changing defence priorities; it is about the Treasury changing spending priorities. The raid on his budget last month destroyed the integrity and the credibility of an objective foreign policy-led strategic defence review. There is worse to come. I invite him to look at the difficult options that his colleagues around the Cabinet table are having to consider: tuition fees for students, charges for GP visits, abolishing the income support lone parent premium, cutting tax incentives for small savers, cutting back passport control, and whatever else emerges from the reviews on which the Government have embarked. If he thinks that a Labour Cabinet will grapple with those issues, with all the political fall-out, and leave him with the defence budget set by an outgoing Conservative Government, he is guilty of extreme naivety.

The Secretary of State continues to paint himself into a corner by writing articles and making speeches saying that the forces are severely overstretched. In an article in *The Independent* in July, which will have enraged the Treasury, he boldly asserted:

> "Slashing our defence spending . . . would in my view completely remove our capacity to mount operations such as those in Bosnia."

Slashing defence expenditure is exactly what many of his colleagues want. Indeed, some of them are on the record making the case, yesterday on television. Reductions in defence expenditure are exactly what the Treasury now proposes to his Department.

The Secretary of State is right, but his assertion sits uncomfortably with all the press reports that we have seen—for example, that the Government are now considering reducing the size of, even abolishing, the Territorial Army. Thousands of soldiers from the TA have served in Bosnia, where they provide an invaluable contribution in front-line operations and in support. Cutting back on operations such as the TA would have nothing to do with a strategic review and everything to do with a short-sighted, short-term effort to reduce costs.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Did my right hon. Friend notice that the Secretary of State first paid great tribute to the flexibility of the armed forces but then said that they had to be modernised? Everything was about modernisation. Indeed, in his last few pages, he talked about modernisation. Does my right hon. Friend not think that this modernisation is just a way of saying, "That's how I'm going to cover up the cuts that are coming"?

Sir George Young: On that specific point, I was impressed with what the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee said—that modernisation or restructuring will cost resources. It is not the case that modernisation is a way of saving money. If one is to modernise and restructure, it will cost. I remind the House that, yesterday, the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee said that where we are at the moment is the base line, and

> "any further cuts will endanger the defence of the realm".

The Secretary of State is a decent man. His reputation can absorb the hit of £168 million but if, as I suspect, the outcome of the review is a substantial reduction in his budget, the decency to which I have referred must lead him to consider his position in the Government. At least he will have been preceded by his Minister of State, now in another place, who is on the record as having said in last year's debate:

> "I also happen to think that this country does not spend enough on defence."—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1996; Vol. 282, c. 506.]

Mr. George Robertson: May I just ask the right hon. Gentleman a simple question? I believe that he is a former Chief Secretary to the Treasury—

Sir George Young: No.

Mr. Robertson: Well, I am sure that he was a Treasury Minister for one ignominious part of his career. Is he in favour of increasing the defence budget now?

Sir George Young: The Conservative Government left a three-year profile for defence expenditure. That was our statement on defence priorities. I do not believe that the Labour Government will be able to adhere to that profile. I think that the Secretary of State will take a hit on his budget next year. I think that he is painting himself into a corner, and will make life very difficult for himself and his colleagues if, in six months' time, he comes back to the House and announces a substantial reduction in defence expenditure.

There are two other flaws in the way in which the review is being conducted. The Secretary of State is refusing to publish the foreign policy base line before he moves on to the next stage of the review. What is the point of the consultation process making the review—in the Secretary of State's words—

> "as open to outside views and ideas as possible"

if the key link in the logical chain is withheld? If we do not know what the foreign policy base line is, how can we comment sensibly—as we are invited to next month—on the defence requirements to deliver that foreign policy?

Will the Secretary of State also concede that the original timetable of six months is now in tatters, as the Treasury will not sign off the strategic defence review until it has finished with other Departments, and that the inevitable blight that the review brings with it will cast a longer shadow than he thought—not least over the procurement budget, with all the job consequences for the United Kingdom?

The second flaw is mentioned again in today's edition of *The Guardian*. Excluding defence equipment from the review poses a risk that equipment will dictate defence policy, rather than the choice of equipment being dictated by policy. The Secretary of State has not dealt with that point at any time during the criticism of the strategic defence review.

The right hon. Gentleman's strategy of trying to neutralise defence as a political issue is also fraying. It was always a bold strategy. Days before Parliament was dissolved on 11 March, his predecessor said in a speech to the Defence Forum:

> "The policy issues I have broadly outlined today differ fundamentally from those of the Government."

Indeed, if the Secretary of State looks at his party's manifesto, he will see that he described our policy as

> "intellectually inert, incoherent and incompetent."

We were therefore slightly surprised to be told after the election that there had been

> "a remarkable convergence among the parties in recent years on the big defence issues."

Convergence is what happens when two parties move closer together. That is not what has happened on defence. We stuck to our principles, and Labour abandoned its principles. The Secretary of State rather delicately admitted that in his speech to RUSI, when he said:

> "events in the 1980s showed that, without a clear and unambiguous commitment to strong defences as an essential part of Britain's foreign policy, the British people would not trust us with Government".

The Labour party's principles made it unelectable, so it decided to change them.

The world has changed since the Labour party thought that the best way in which to see off the Soviet threat was to abandon the nuclear deterrent. The end of the cold war—as the Secretary of State said—has replaced the old unpredictability of defence policy with much more complex problems. Britain's role in the world, and the demands on our armed forces, are changing. We have had to redefine our basic assumptions about security. There is no longer an enemy; there are only enemies—terrorism, dictatorships and regional instability, threatening wider destabilisation. There are, however, consistent themes in response. Those themes are the need to maintain a first-rate, well-equipped, flexible fighting force, the need to co-operate with our allies and the need to assess our security and foreign policy commitments in a global context.

NATO has provided the framework to meet those requirements since the second world war. It has been the bedrock on which peace and security in Europe have been built. We owe a continuing debt to our allies in the United States for playing the role of guarantor of peace in Europe for the past 50 years. If it is the European Union that has dominated the headlines in recent years and, indeed, today, it is the stability and security that NATO provided that have made the European Union possible.

The balance of power in Europe has now changed, and there is an opportunity to bring a number of the former Communist countries into the NATO alliance. Conservative Members whole-heartedly welcome both the continuation of the initiative taken under the last Government to begin negotiations with Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to enable them to join the alliance and the commitment to an open-door policy on further enlargement. It is a measure of how much we take peace and security for granted that the enlargement of NATO merits such small mention in the news bulletins, whereas, at any other time in our history, discussion about alliances such as these would have dominated the political debate.

Mr. Hawkins: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Conservative Members are particularly keen for former Warsaw pact countries such as the Baltic states to be able to preserve their security in future? Will he also confirm that we intend to keep up the pressure on the Government to ensure that they are very much aware of the special position of the Baltic states?

Sir George Young: It is very important for the countries that were not recently invited to join NATO to know that there is an open-door policy, allowing the prospect of their joining later. My hon. Friend has made a good point. The significance of NATO has always been wider than its military purpose. It is about shared values, the spread of democratic institutions under civilian control and respect for human rights. While the applicant countries want membership because it brings them under a collective umbrella, providing stability and security that they have not had for centuries, the membership conditions in turn reinforce peace and stability in Europe as democracies do not declare war on each other.

There will, however, be costs as a result of NATO enlargement. On 9 July, in his statement on NATO enlargement, the Prime Minister told the House that there was no reason why Britain's contribution to NATO budgets—currently some £155 million—should rise significantly in real terms. Perhaps the Minister who is to reply will tell us whether that is indeed the latest assessment of the cost to the United Kingdom of NATO enlargement.

We need to be prepared to bear our share of the costs of enlargement. Although enlargement is being welcomed within the alliance, there are those in the United States in particular who will question whether there is a rationale for the US to extend its defence commitments to the east in the post-cold war era. Any failure on the part of NATO's European partners to bear their share of the costs of enlargement would play into their hands and put at risk ratification of the process, which is by no means a foregone conclusion.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Many politicians, left, right and centre, repeat parrot fashion that there are enormous costs relating to the enlargement of NATO, and then stop. I invite the shadow Secretary of State to list those additional costs. I think that they are either

[Mr. Andrew Mackinlay]

exaggerated or wholly bogus. I should like him to tell us what he thinks the additional costs are, because I do not think that they are of the significance that he asserts.

Sir George Young: There is a collective agreement on security. If we incur new commitments to defend countries that we do not have to defend now, that may impose additional costs on us. The question is: what is the latest assessment of the additional costs to the United Kingdom? The hon. Gentleman says that there are no costs. He may have seen the estimates made by the Clinton Administration, which refer to several billion pounds of extra costs for existing members as a direct result of enlargement. The Library has produced a very interesting paper on the subject, to which the hon. Gentleman might like to address himself.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir George Young: For the last time; then I must make progress.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. Friend, and Her Majesty's Government, bear it in mind that, whereas it may be incumbent on NATO—understandably—to bear infrastructural costs to ensure the enlargement of the alliance, the position relating to the European Union is in dramatic contradistinction? Its member countries, notably the United Kingdom, pay more and more, although it has not yet enlarged.

Sir George Young: That is an ingenious debating point, to which I do not propose to respond.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) will have more to say later about procurement, but I think it appropriate, before I leave the issue of NATO enlargement, for me to mention the opportunity that exists for British defence manufacturers among the countries that are seeking to join the alliance. The British defence industry has continued to make great strides in recent years in improving efficiency and competitiveness. It is well placed to take advantage of the new market opportunities that closer defence co-operation with countries in central and eastern Europe will present.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: I must make progress, because many hon. Members want to make a contribution.

At some point, Europe will need to address the structure of its defence industries if it is to respond to the rationalisation of capacity that has taken place on the other side of the Atlantic.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury and I have just returned from a visit to Bosnia, as has the Secretary of State. We saw at first hand the work of the British forces serving in SFOR. They are carrying out with the utmost dedication and professionalism and in the most difficult circumstances the task of helping to return Bosnia to the status of a functioning peacetime democracy.

Some progress has been made in the two years since the signing of the Dayton agreement. The war is, for the moment, over. However, there is still a great deal to do: a huge number of refugees have yet to return to their homes; the new political institutions envisaged by the Dayton accord remain paralysed; there is a continuing political crisis in the Republika Srpska; there are territorial tensions in Brcko and in other areas; and, despite the shooting and arrest of two suspected war criminals in Prijedor in July, there has been insufficient progress in other sectors on the arrest of other indicted war criminals, notably Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic.

Against that background, it is clear that the original deadline for the withdrawal of foreign troops when the SFOR mandate expires in June 1998 is now unrealistic. Unless British troops and those of our allies remain in Bosnia until the transition to peace is completed, all the work that they have done will be at risk and the region will return to bloodshed.

The road to lasting peace is long and difficult. The continued participation of the United States is absolutely essential, both for the strength that our allies can bring in ensuring that the local armies remain in their barracks, and for the signal that United States involvement sends to those watching developments in Bosnia from the sidelines. Our troop commitment must be sufficient to guarantee the continued involvement of US troops.

In many ways, what is happening in Bosnia is a good example of the type of operation in which British forces will increasingly be involved. They have gained invaluable experience in Northern Ireland, where they have won the trust of local communities while remaining resolute and impartial in preserving peace and protecting the civilian population. No other country has the ability to operate in twin mode as well as we do. We must also preserve the capability to engage in a high-intensity conflict should the need arise, or should a peacekeeping operation escalate into a more violent struggle.

The Opposition welcome the willingness of the new Government to build on the work begun by the previous Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The current cessation of violence has enabled a reduction to be made in the number of British troops on active service, which alleviates the drain on the Army's resources that the Province represents and allows more time for rest and training. We would welcome further reductions in the number of troops should circumstances allow, but caution that the security of the civilian population must not be compromised for financial considerations.

It is clear that the terrorist threat remains. On my recent visit, it was made clear to me that the guns and explosives are still in the hands of those who may resort to them should the peace process no longer suit their purposes. We must remain ready to meet that threat with force should the necessity to do so arise.

The Secretary of State mentioned land mines. No one should underestimate the contribution made by the Princess of Wales to the efforts to rid the world of the scourge of land mines. She raised the profile of the campaign and gave it added momentum, so that it made a significant breakthrough in the public consciousness. The campaign has lost a great champion of its cause. The best tribute is to ensure that her work was not in vain.

A meaningful ban on land mines will come only when the major exporters of such weapons have also agreed to a ban. We welcome the signing of the Oslo agreement, but it is severely weakened because it does not include the major manufacturers of land mines: China, Russia and Pakistan. The land mines debate has rightly focused on negotiations for a future ban, but the problem requires a dual approach: working towards a ban and removing existing mines. Even if all countries signed up to a ban—they are not about to—the number of lives and limbs saved in the near future is likely to be small, relative to the number saved by a more aggressive clearance policy. I welcome the Government's announcement last week of an initiative to support the efforts of mine clearance agencies. We should accept that land mines have had a military purpose, so work to encourage the development of alternatives that can achieve that purpose without the same devastation is essential.

I cannot do justice to the many other defence issues, such as the disarmament talks, recruitment and personnel issues, training and defence co-operation within the European Union, without trespassing too much on the time of the House. I know that my hon. Friends will deal with those matters in their contributions. However, I want to end with a word about the royal yacht Britannia.

The previous Government had a clear policy. We announced it, we defended it before the House and, had we won the election, we would have done what we promised—but that is history. The new Government have decided not to replace the royal yacht. They prefer to spend £50 million on a Welsh Assembly, which will not generate any exports. However, I want to dwell not on their decision but on the disgraceful way in which that important national issue was handled, because of the Government's obsession with presentation, which got them into such trouble earlier, and the shameless way in which they are prepared to manipulate issues such as the royal yacht for party political ends.

We know that the Government exercise strong central control of the presentation of policy to the media, because the Minister without Portfolio told us so in an article in *The Guardian* on 18 September. He said:

> "each departmental spoke comes together in a strong central hub"

and

> "Effective co-ordination and presentation has been a key factor"

in the running of the Government's media operations. In a sentence that he may regret, given what subsequently happened, he said:

> "we have no intention of repeating the shambolic way in which the last government was run."

That was an unhappy thing to say against the background of the statement made earlier.

On Sunday 3 August, a series of stories appeared in national newspapers saying that the Government had decided in principle to extend the life of Britannia through a deal for a refit with private sector companies. "Queen offered 'pay as you sail' yacht" was the headline in *The Observer*; "Britannia timeshare offer to Queen" in *The Sunday Times*; "Royal yacht may be saved" in the *Independent on Sunday*; and "Labour offers the Queen a reprieve for Britannia" in *The Sunday Telegraph*.

I wrote to the Secretary of State to ask why the Ministry of Defence had made no official press statement, why no Defence or Treasury Minister had appeared on television to substantiate or expand the story, and why *The Sunday Times* had reported that the Ministry of Defence said that it knew nothing of the decision until the story had been confirmed to the paper by the Treasury.

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Dr. John Reid): Sheer speculation.

Sir George Young: Does the Minister invite the House to believe that four or five Sunday newspapers decided, wholly independently, that the future of Britannia was a front-page story? It is more likely that there was a briefing. I want to know what briefing by Government officials or Ministers took place before that Sunday.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir George Young: No, I must make progress.

If the briefing was not given by the Ministry of Defence and if it knew that it was inaccurate, who gave the briefing and why? Was it a smokescreen to obscure something that was happening at the same time? The ultimate humiliation for the Secretary of State was when not he but the Chancellor confirmed, in an off-the-cuff remark in a television interview with Sir David Frost, that the Government were not going to replace the royal yacht.

I mention that incident with Britannia because it shows the Government at their worst. Their spinning has gone beyond the stage of deceiving the batsman; it is deceiving the fielders. The cynical manipulation of news and non-news, leading to the resignation of senior members of the Government Information Service, is one of the most sinister developments since 1 May. The Secretary of State may have been an innocent party in the Britannia episode, but that makes the cynicism of those responsible even worse.

On the Secretary of State's performance as a whole, the jury is out. The clash between his rhetoric and the agenda of his Treasury colleagues will be resolved next year. The results of the strategic defence review will be known, so we shall be able to judge whether it was the objective exercise that he told us it would be. He will have our support in resisting those in his party who see his budget as a soft touch. However, if, next year, he discovers a new and burning ambition to be the first Scottish Prime Minister, we shall know that he has lost his battle and that, contrary to what we were told in the election, the defence of our country is not safe with Labour.

6.19 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State on his first appearance at the Dispatch Box in this annual debate. I also welcome the shadow Secretary of State. I hope that I do not insult both of them when I say that the speech that each delivered could as easily have been delivered by the other. In truth, the differences between the two sides of the House on defence issues are probably much smaller than they have been at any time over the past 20 years.

The debate takes place in a vacuum because, unlike such debates in the recent past, there is no White Paper upon which we can concentrate. In addition, the Secretary of State has made no clear statement on the foreign policy objectives that are to be served by the United Kingdom's

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

defence capability. He has been consistent in that because, of course, just before the summer recess he answered a parliamentary question to the effect that he would not make such a statement. In his evidence to the Select Committee on Defence he also declined to give a clear statement of foreign policy objectives.

It was with some enthusiasm, even anticipation, that I read the speech that the Secretary of State delivered to the Royal United Services Institute on 18 September. As an analysis of what needs to be done and how to do it, the speech can hardly be faulted, but as an indication of Government thinking it gave very little assistance. I was driven to the conclusion that it could just as easily have been delivered by Sir Malcolm Rifkind or even Mr. Michael Portillo after the period of compulsory re-education that followed his first speech as Secretary of State for Defence to his party conference.

The question that will haunt the Ministry of Defence is the financial one. The Secretary of State is right to say that defence cuts are not new. As he said, the defence budget is now 2.7 per cent. of gross domestic product. That is the lowest percentage since the 1930s and since the mid-1980s there has been a 29 per cent. reduction in real terms. Throughout the period of the reduction since the mid-1980s, it could hardly have been argued that the Conservative Government had the overwhelming support of Labour or indeed of my party, the Liberal Democrats. Those reductions were driven through in the face of substantial opposition from all parts of the House.

As long as the strategic defence review is driven by Britain's long-term defence needs, it will be a valuable exercise. One could argue that when it has been completed it will be difficult for the Treasury to make drastic changes to the defence budget because the Secretary of State will have available on paper exactly how much it costs to ensure that Britain is properly protected. The Secretary of State asserts on this occasion, as he has on many others, that the review is foreign policy led and not Treasury led. That is an entirely logical position, but those of us who have an interest in these matters cannot escape the conclusion that the ghosts at this feast are Whelan, Balls and Brown. They sound more like a Dublin firm of pawnbrokers than those who might be responsible for the future of Britain's defence effort.

There are not three balls but three posts in this defence review. First, the Government say that they are committed to the Eurofighter—costing about £16.5 billion—with the support of the whole House. *[Interruption.]* I have always understood that to be the stance of the Conservative Front Bench. If it has changed its position, it will no doubt explain that to the House and the country.

Secondly, the Government are committed to a four-boat Trident force. Thirdly, it is clear to anyone who pays any regard to these matters that there is no possibility of increased defence expenditure in the United Kingdom in real terms in the foreseeable future. Those are three substantial inhibitions on the scope of any defence review.

The Secretary of State has declined to state clear foreign policy objectives. I shall be helpful to the Government by suggesting a series of foreign policy objectives that they should adopt. First, they should be much more active in seeking to develop a common foreign and security policy with our allies in Europe, maintaining, of course, the individual right of member states to decide whether their national forces should take part in any particular action. Against a background of static or even declining defence budgets, far greater integration in Europe is the only logical response.

Of course we must maintain the transatlantic link, but we should work for a more mature and less dependent relationship with the United States through NATO, with the emergence of the Western European Union as the agent for the European security and defence identity and as a strengthened European pillar of NATO. We should promote and expand joint European defence co-operation and force specialisation with our neighbours. We are already engaged in joint force operations with many of them. In conjunction with our allies we should also develop a comprehensive conflict prevention strategy to co-ordinate foreign, development, defence, trade and environmental policies.

There is a growing argument that the separation of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence is becoming increasingly difficult to justify. The bridge between those two Departments is the issue of security. There is great scope for considering the creation of one Ministry dealing with all Britain's external affairs.

The Government should resist the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and they should undertake to implement their responsibilities under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and encourage others to sign the comprehensive test ban treaty. We should press for a new strategic arms reduction treaty involving all the notified nuclear weapons powers. The Government should actively support and strengthen the ability of the United Nations in peace support and peacekeeping. That includes the establishment of permanent United Nations forces, enhanced intelligence gathering, improved military planning and a United Nations staff college. We should maintain our permanent membership of an enlarged United Nations Security Council and participate, as far as resources allow, in UN military actions across the spectrum of peace support and humanitarian relief.

Surely the Government recognise the need to work to control arms sales. We should end the sale of British arms or materials and dual-use technologies to regimes that abuse human rights. We should work with our European partners to create a European Union code of conduct that is clear, explicit and rigorous to prevent the transfer of weapons or weapons technology to countries that we know are likely to abuse them. We should certainly be concerned about a system of environmental protection and about free trade and human rights.

That is a set of foreign policy objectives for the Government. How much better would our debate about military matters be instructed if we heard from the Government about their foreign policy objectives. That would enable us better to assess whether the defence capabilities that they propose are apt to meet them.

Nuclear policy presents an opportunity for bold and innovative thinking. For the whole of my political life I have been committed to the independent nuclear deterrent. There is still a place for nuclear deterrence and it is still right for the United Kingdom to maintain that capability, but surely we have put aside the days when Trident drove defence policy, perhaps to the extent of eliminating all other considerations. When the utility of nuclear deterrence was obvious in the 1970s and 1980s, the Labour party spurned it. Now that the utility of nuclear deterrence can be given a lower priority, we are entitled to look to the Government for a great deal of imagination and innovation, so let us start.

First, there should be no more warheads on Trident than on Polaris, which it is to replace; it is independently targetable, it has greater range and it has greater accuracy. Secondly, we should abandon the Moscow criterion—the principle that says that we cannot have an independent nuclear deterrent unless we are satisfied that it can breach all the ballistic missile defences around Moscow.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I shall develop the points that I want to make on nuclear matters and then, if he is still interested, I shall be happy to give way to him.

The Moscow criterion is wholly inconsistent with NATO's doctrine of minimum deterrence. The UK should make an annual declaration of the total size of its operational nuclear arsenal. No prejudice would result as a consequence of that. The United States and Russia have to do it as part of the strategic arms reduction treaty and it would help to promote transparency and assist in confidence building. The UK should promote an initiative whereby, so long as Russia and the United States continue to reduce stockpiles, Britain, France and China would bind themselves not to increase the size of their nuclear arsenals.

The UK should seek the establishment of a five-power nuclear forum before the non-proliferation treaty review conference in 2000, not only to improve safety but to strengthen security. We should also back an international nuclear weapons register as a means of increasing transparency.

All those things would operate in an effective and coherent way in continuing to reduce the extent to which nuclear weapons form part of the defence architecture of the UK and of others, and they could all be effected without any prejudice to the deterrent's independence or to its effectiveness in the purpose for which it has been conceived.

The fourth Trident submarine should not be cancelled. The financial savings from doing so would be relatively limited. Indeed, one could argue that a three-boat fleet would increase the risk of having to make an early decision on force replacement. The extension of the lifetime of the existing Trident system, so that consideration of a replacement can be postponed, is an entirely laudable objective. We should consider integrating patrol and refit schedules with those of the French and look with an open mind at the readiness of the nuclear deterrent.

I do not believe in formal declarations such as "no first use". It would be much better to emphasise NATO's doctrine of minimum deterrence and that these are weapons of last resort. In that respect, the declaration by the United States that it has no plans to deploy nuclear weapons in new NATO member countries is clearly helpful.

Mr. Corbyn: I have listened carefully to what the hon. and learned Gentleman has said about nuclear weapons. Will he tell the House exactly who he thinks is an enemy against which a nuclear weapon should be directed and in what circumstances he would be prepared to unleash a nuclear holocaust on the globe?

Mr. Campbell: I do not have my finger on that button and the hon. Gentleman will no doubt address his question to the Secretary of State for Defence, but he misunderstands the concept of deterrence. The point about deterrence is not whether one would press the button; it is whether a potential adversary is uncertain about whether that is the case. That is not my definition. I first heard it when Lord Younger of Prestwick, as he now is, was Secretary of State for Defence. The essence of deterrence is uncertainty in the mind of a potential adversary.

During the Gulf war—the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) will remember this better than most of us—there was a certain threat that Saddam Hussein might use weapons of mass destruction. The advice given back through the appropriate diplomatic channels was that if there was any effort to use weapons of mass destruction, the response—the word was chosen with some care—would be "disproportionate". Most people understood what the shorthand meant. A feature of the Gulf war was that Saddam Hussein—as we now know from the activities of Mr. Rolf Ekeus and others on the UN Special Commission on Iraq—had substantial capacity to use weapons of mass destruction, but never did so.

People often say to those of us who support nuclear deterrence, "Can you give us an instance where it has worked?" We can never prove this to a mathematical certainty, but I am willing to accept that the threat of a disproportionate response had a great deal to do with Saddam Hussein's reluctance to use weapons of mass destruction. Those are the sort of circumstances in which deterrence is likely to be effective. Of course, if someone presses the button he has failed because the weapon has failed to carry out its purpose—to act as a deterrent—but until there are far fewer nuclear weapons I am not disposed to give up the UK nuclear deterrent.

Eurofighter is one of the constants in the defence review. Notwithstanding articles in *The Guardian*, which has somehow become a popular newspaper of reference in the House, I remain convinced of Eurofighter's military, economic and technological advantages. For the moment, I want to concentrate on the military requirements.

The UK requires an agile jet fighter. The Tornado F3 Interceptor, as its name suggests, was designed to intercept Soviet aircraft across the North sea. It is not an agile fighter in the term in which that is understood. Indeed, its limitations were shown in the Gulf war, when the scope of operations on which it could be sent was substantially limited.

Eurofighter was designed against the SU27, a Soviet, now Russian, aircraft, which, with its derivatives, is freely available. It is sold not quite at knock-down prices, but at economic and encouraging rates. There is every chance that, on some future occasion, Royal Air Force pilots carrying out operations on behalf either of the UK or, perhaps more likely, of the UN or NATO, might find themselves flying against aircraft of the capability of the SU27. It is right that we should provide those pilots with the best possible equipment in the form of an aircraft that is capable of dealing with that threat.

[Mr. Campbell]

No European option is as capable. Neither the French Rafale nor the Grippen has the capability. Of course, there are American choices; we flirted with some of them when Mr. Michael Portillo had stewardship of the MOD. It sounded rather paradoxical. We were going to hire second-hand F16s while leasing out F3s to the Italians, whose need for Eurofighter is probably greater than anyone else's.

The Americans supply countries with an aircraft at very low initial cost, but then they get their pound of flesh by the substantial through-life costs that necessarily attach to it. An F16 procurement would signal the end of that particular technical capability in the UK. Nor is there any guarantee that we would receive the top-of-the-range model. When the Saudi Arabians bought the F15E from the United States, because of the United States' political sympathy for Israel, they were given not the top-of-the-range model, but something called the F15XS, an F15E minus. Pakistan wanted to purchase 16 F16s, but that sale was blocked by Congress for political reasons. It would not be right for us to embark on a programme that allowed us to be so dependent on opinion in Congress which, if I may put the matter delicately, is not always entirely sympathetic to our foreign policy objectives.

Eurofighter is important for the future of the European defence industrial base, but we are entitled—here I pay tribute to what the Secretary of State for Defence said about the need for effective use of resources—to demand cost-effective procurement. The National Audit Office report on defence procurement, which showed that only five out of 25 products met the in-service target dates, that overspending on some projects was as high as 10 per cent. and that the procurement budget was overspending by about £1.3 billion, made shocking reading.

We are entitled to expect that, when substantial sums of that order are invested in procurement, we obtain value for money. We have to remind ourselves only that the C130J is now 16 months late and that the Challenger 2 main battle tank is not yet universally in service. Those were important procurement decisions. It is unacceptable that the aircraft and the main battle tank are not yet in service. The NAO report went so far as to say that procurement was so far behind schedule that Britain's defences were being put at risk and that outdated ships, tanks and aircraft were being patched up at a cost of £400 million.

I should like to refer to three personnel issues. There is and there can be no place for racism in the armed forces of the United Kingdom. It is often associated with bullying and occurs because of prejudice. I cannot resist the conclusion that it flourishes where non-commissioned officers and other officers either ignore it or are not alive to the fact of its taking place. I believe that the culture of the armed services should be such that responsibility for racism is part of the chain of command.

The Government know my view about homosexuality—I believe it to be an issue of fundamental human rights. Virtually every other NATO country does not need a policy of the kind that we have. It was a highly controversial issue in the presidential campaign when Bill Clinton was first elected, but even there a compromise was reached. I predict that the Government will be compelled by operation of law to change their policy. It would be far, far better to do it now with grace and without compulsion.

On the role of women, I welcome the principle that the Secretary of State has outlined. We should pause just for a moment, however, to remind ourselves that the armed services sometimes have to kill and are sometimes killed. Public opinion in this country would require some fairly careful tutoring before it was willing to accept the prospect of large numbers of women being killed in combat. I am an enthusiastic proponent of equality, as is, I am sure, the right hon. Gentleman, but we are obliged to take that prospect into account.

The right hon. Gentleman was right to mention the infantry. As I reminded him at a meeting of the Defence Committee, we should recall that Mount Tumbledown was cleared by soldiers of the Scots Guards and other regiments, who used bayonets to clear Argentines out of the trenches. We must ask ourselves whether that is the sort of role that a society such as ours would easily envisage for women. Indeed, one must ask whether it is a role that women would want to fulfil. Some brakes may be applied to that policy and the extent to which universal equality of opportunity is either available or is sought to be taken up.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The House would be fascinated to know the Liberal Democrat party's official policy on homosexuals in the armed forces.

Mr. Campbell: I just said it. In the previous Parliament we debated the issue on at least two occasions. The then Opposition spokesman, now Minister for the Armed Forces, made probably the best speech of the debate, but when the Division came he and I voted in separate Lobbies. I take the view that there should be no discrimination against people on the grounds of sex, gender or sexual orientation in the armed services or anywhere else. I repeat that virtually every other member country of NATO is able to offer effective, well-managed and well-led forces to the NATO effort without having such a policy in place. There is no secret about Liberal Democrat policy and I am happy to spell it out once again.

I should like to discuss Bosnia, which was also mentioned by the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young). We are entering a most delicate stage in considering the future of the NATO-led deployment in Bosnia and there will have to be some careful negotiation. Perhaps I could suggest some principles for consideration. First, we should not throw away the gains of the past two years, imperfect though some of them may have been. Secondly, I believe that the United Kingdom should be willing to continue to be part of an international force by whatever name it may be described with the intention—and one would hope the achievement—of maintaining peace support in Bosnia.

Thirdly, a substantial United States presence is required, but whether that can be on the ground raises some very difficult political issues, particularly for President Clinton and Congress. We should have some sensitivity towards them, although I do not shrink from the principle that the presence of the United States is important for both political and military reasons and that a presence on the ground would be an encouragement and an endorsement of the efforts of others.

We should not shrink from assuming a greater role of leadership in Bosnia, consistent with the safety of United Kingdom forces, because we have a proficiency in peace support—it is probably unrivalled—as a direct result of our experience in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State has set his hand to a fundamental defence review. The consequences of what he and the Government decide will affect the nature of defence in this country for a long time because even if there is a change of Government in 2002, by then significant and important decisions will have been taken which will not be capable of reversal or will be capable of only minor modification. It is in the interests not just of the House but of the country that those decisions are as well informed as they can be and that they are in the long-term interests of the country.

So long as the Secretary of State maintains that principle, he will certainly have our support, but he must expect that we will want to be certain that the assumptions upon which he makes his decisions are valid.

6.45 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I rise to speak as Chairman of the Defence Select Committee. One of the great advantages of being the Chairman of a Committee is that one has the chance of being called in a debate. There was a time in the 1970s when a Labour Back Bencher had every likelihood of getting called, but as Labour took more interest in defence issues it became increasingly difficult. I am glad I stand a much better chance now.

I have served on the Defence Committee since 1979, when we still had sailing ships in the Royal Navy and rather imperfect weapons to defend the country. The reports of the Defence Committee that I have amassed since 1979 stand yards long on my shelves. One thing has characterised the near 200 reports that we have produced; virtually every one was critical of the Government, whatever aspect of defence we examined.

I am delighted to see that one of the old hands of our Defence Committee, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), is present. He will be able to advise his colleague, the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), when to keep his mouth shut, which should be for much of the time. I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his rapid deployment from Ealing to north Hampshire, which will provide a model for our armed forces in the future on how to get from one environment to a totally different one—to our collective advantage.

I have served under seven Chairmen of the Defence Committee, and in all honesty they have all been truly excellent. Unfortunately, membership of the Defence Committee carries with it something like the curse of Lord Gnome. Sir Nicholas Bonsor was Chairman; then he was relegated to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and then he lost his seat. Sir Nicholas Fairbairn died, and Winston Churchill did not stand for re-election. I hope that he is not signing on at his local employment exchange—I doubt it. Neville Trotter was a member of the Committee from 1992, but he did not stand for re-election. Keith Mans, another member of the Committee, lost his seat at the election. The curse of Lord Gnome even applies to the Secretary of State for Defence, and in recent years two of them met the same fate as most of the colleagues I have mentioned.

I am sad to record that some of the stalwart members of our Committee, notably my hon. Friends the Members for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) and for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), and the hon. Members for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) and for Salisbury, no longer serve on it. I greatly regret that. The current membership of the Committee is new, because just four members of the previous Committee survived the election. We are all having to learn a great deal—some have a greater obligation to learn than others—but I am sure that, in time, that deficiency in our knowledge will be rectified.

The previous Select Committee, of which the hon. Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin) was Chairman, gave the new Committee an agenda, asking us please to follow up some of its inquiries and produce reports, and we will do so. We will reflect on that period of change in our security orientation, but there will be a continuation of some of the almost inexorable features of British security policy since the second world war.

One such feature is the progressive, although erratic and unplanned, decline of defence expenditure. When Labour left office in 1979, defence expenditure had averaged 4.9 per cent. of gross domestic product; now it is 2.7 per cent., and under the previous Government it was projected to fall to 2.4 per cent. I know that not all my hon. Friends will agree, but I believe that, if we are to have a credible defence and foreign policy, we are approaching, or have reached, the bedrock. As the shadow Secretary of State said, and as the hon. Member for Salisbury agreed by signing up to the last report of the previous Select Committee, any further cuts would endanger the defence of the realm.

All Defence Select Committees since 1979 have critically evaluated the actions of the Ministry of Defence, and I have no doubt that the present Committee will do exactly the same and produce an endless stream of critical reports. We are gearing ourselves up for the publication of the strategic defence review report in the spring. We will visit Bosnia next week and the United States in January. We are evaluating the way in which the United States has conducted its quadrennial review process.

We have signed up some excellent advisers, have had several months to prepare, and eagerly await the fruits of the strategic defence review. I am not in any way opposed to an imaginative approach, but if it is true that the Treasury has got its hands on the review, that is very much to be regretted. Anyone who wants to evaluate the pernicious role that the Treasury has played in defence over the years should read much that has been written about the 1930s. The Treasury is not the most suitably qualified institution to evaluate our future strategic and security orientation. It must be there to advise, but I hope that the Ministry of Defence will not fall prostrate before it.

Several of our reports have recently been commented on by the new Government, and I hope that the new Committee will proceed, on the advice of the previous Committee, with inquiries into the sale of the married quarters estate, which was not one of the previous Government's wisest decisions. I certainly hope that we will follow up our third report on defence medical services.

I am sure that we are approaching a consensus, as the Labour party got so much better on defence just as the previous Government got so much worse. We have

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perhaps achieved parity, and both Government and Opposition spokesmen have a great deal of recent history to live down; I shall enjoy the spectacle as they try to do so.

Defence cost study 15 epitomises the way in which the previous Government managed the decline in defence expenditure. It was probably the worst researched and most disastrous part of the review. I will not bore the House with more than a few key sentences from a report that we all know had an in-built Conservative majority. It said:

> "The current state of the Defence Medical Services is an indictment of MOD's ability to manage change. No amount of self-justification can disguise the fact that the country does not have a medical service capable of looking after the maximum number of soldiers the UK plans to deploy in a crisis."

We said that defence cost study 15 was a disgrace, and that shortage of staff remained a key issue. We recommended that the Ministry conduct an effective review of the operation of the defence medical services. I very much hope that that review will be conducted during this Parliament.

Our report said:

> "staff shortages in the Defence Medical Services are so serious that it is not clear whether it will recover. It is possible that the military ethos of medicine in the regular armed forces has been destroyed. It seems incredible that the scaling down of the Defence Medical Services has been effected by MOD in such a manner as to allow a major and potentially critical staff shortage to develop."

I hope that our Committee and the Ministry of Defence will examine the sale of MOD estate and the rundown of defence medical services.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Before the hon. Gentleman, who is my Chairman on the Defence Select Committee, moves on from the sale of married quarters estate, does he agree that the future level of rent rises for armed forces married quarters is an important piece of unfinished business, especially in the light of the strain on families that has been emphasised by hon. Members of all parties?

Mr. George: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention, as he was one of the few hon. Members who had the courage to abstain on the matter in the previous Parliament, after a great deal of pressure was exerted on him by the Whips. I hope that our Committee will follow the request of the previous Committee and revisit the issue, although it must be obvious to everyone that the die has been cast and the sale completed.

I also hope that we will return to the question of the Ministry of Defence police and security. Security cannot be compromised, and I hope that no more bits of Trident, or anything else, will go missing. Fraud in the MOD continues to be investigated, and if we continue to lose parts of Trident, as we apparently have in the past few years, supporters of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament will be able to claim that Britain has indeed denuclearised.

The Committee will return to the issue of heavy lift—I am profoundly disappointed that Lockheed Martin has failed as yet to deliver the C130J—and I hope that we will consider merchant shipping, most of which has disappeared in the past 15 years. I trust that we shall continue to investigate Gulf war syndrome—if that is the correct phrase—and I welcome the positive and supportive view taken by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces; I compliment him, and I hope that he will soon repeat his visit of a few months ago to the Committee, because we are committed to monitoring continuously what is being done in the MOD to further research something that I believe was detrimental to our armed forces.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The hon. Gentleman, the Chairman of my former Committee, will remember that towards the end of the previous Parliament I spoke in the Committee about the difference between the Ministry of Defence's attitude towards serving soldiers, sailors and airmen and its attitude towards those who had retired. The latter often find it difficult to get justice for an injury sustained as a result of service. Will the Committee consider that matter?

Mr. George: I very much regret the hon. Gentleman's disappearance from our number, and I recall vividly that he persuaded the previous Committee to pursue the subject of the way in which the Ministry of Defence compensates those who have suffered as a result of service on behalf of the Crown.

We are still in the process of considering compensating the soldiers who suffered cancer as a result of the atomic tests of the 1950s. I would not encourage anyone to believe that the MOD moves at more than glacial speed. Nevertheless, the issue must be taken up, and I shall put it to the Committee when we have completed our strategic defence review inquiry, which will dominate our activities over the next few months.

I have a few more points on issues that the Defence Committee took up but on which it was not satisfied with the answers received. On the new defence college, I regret that the Greenwich Royal Naval college will no longer be put to the purpose for which it was devised. I suggested that that building or the new millennium park could serve as an exhibition of MOD, War Office or Admiralty foul-ups over the past 200 or 300 years, but I was advised that there was not enough room. I had a number of ideas about what could be included. Certainly the period 1979 to 1997 would have required a great deal of space.

The whole concept of the future defence college has been most maladroitly pursued over the past two or three years. I very much regret the fate of Greenwich Royal Naval college. Perhaps it is not entirely too late to reappraise.

The Defence Committee will visit Bosnia shortly. We have the second largest force there, and it is almost patronising to repeat how wonderful it is. I hope that the United States will not abandon its commitment to Bosnia or scale down its forces to a level that would render its contribution less than a critical mass. As was said in the press today, the US cannot deploy only its naval and air forces and withdraw its land forces; their presence is critical. I hope that the US Congress will see how very important is the continuing presence in large numbers of US armed forces.

In a few days, the hon. Member for Romsey and the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) will join me on a visit to Bonn, where we shall discuss with our colleagues on the Defence

Committee in Germany the future of the Eurofighter. I hope that Germany will remain in the programme. Germany's Government want it, our Government want it, and I hope that the German Parliament will accept that it is necessary.

I am sad that Vickers is getting out of car production. The next time that it appears before the Defence Committee and plays the Union Jack card, I shall politely remind it that, having sustained its production of tanks, and not yet having seen the product of the vast investment that the country has put into keeping an indigenous tank capability, Sir Colin Chandler and his colleagues should have considered more seriously the need to retain Rolls-Royce, which is surely the flagship of Britain's industry. Perhaps Sir Colin will soon visit the Defence Committee to explain how successful his company has been in producing the Challenger tank.

Lastly, I welcome the new defence teams to the first of many head-banging sessions. I hope that the House will be able to reach a degree of consensus. We require competent armed forces and competent doctrine. Competent forces can be provided only by adequate resources. As a legislature, it is our task not only to consider the threat now, next week or next month; the decisions of the strategic defence review will have to last for the next quarter of a century. That requires a far-sightedness for which neither Treasuries nor legislatures are well equipped.

I only hope that we can break the habits of a lifetime and provide properly funded armed forces that are not grossly overstretched, to serve our needs and those of our NATO and European partners and of the United Nations. I must repeat that we have reached the bedrock of defence expenditure, and that any further cuts will endanger the defence of the realm.

7.3 pm

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who has been a distinguished and active member of Defence Select Committees over many years. I congratulate him on his promotion to the chairmanship of the Committee. Without in any way wishing offence, I must say that the Secretary of State would have learned a lot more if he had stayed because the hon. Gentleman knows much more about defence than the Secretary of State has yet been able to learn.

The Secretary of State is a good and agile debater but the jury is obviously still out on whether he will be any good as Secretary of State. One of his colleagues shopped him before he even started. I hung on to a quotation in *The Independent* from a shadow Minister in January—I apologise for the language—who said:

> "Look, none of us has the first sodding idea about what government means, whether any of us will be any good at it, or even what being good at it means.
>
> In many respects the skills required in opposition are diametrically opposite to the skills needed in government. Some of my colleagues have made a career out of being a conduit for leaks from the civil service to the press. That's hardly going to be much good in government."

On today of all days, it is quite clear that some still carry on the practice.

I said that the jury must still be out on whether the Secretary of State will be any good in the most difficult job in a Labour Government. The Chairman of the Defence Committee spelt out that we have reached bedrock. In launching the defence review, the Secretary of State said that no one would seriously expect defence to get any more money. That was not the best foot to put forward with the Treasury in starting a review. It would have pocketed the quotation and realised that it was downwards only from then on.

This is our first debate on defence under the new Government. I appreciate that the Secretary of State has written to me to ask whether I would be prepared to talk to him about defence policy. I will do so. That is a constructive approach. On the defence of our country, we will certainly stand up for what we believe is right and, as a party, defend the policies that we have stood for in the past. We are proud of what we have done on defence. However, we all care about our country and defence is one of the areas where the US approach of being more bipartisan on defence and overseas matters is appropriate. We have managed to encourage the Labour party to a much more constructive defence policy than that which it adopted in the past. Its beliefs are going in the right direction; the challenge is whether it will be able to carry those beliefs through with the necessary resources.

I am afraid that in marking the card so far, it has been a difficult start for the Secretary of State. Under no circumstances should the position of Secretary of State for Defence be a consolation prize for not being Secretary of State for Scotland. Lord Younger of Prestwick has been mentioned. On more than adequately discharging his duties as Secretary of State for Scotland, he was promoted to Secretary of State for Defence. That is the relative order of importance of the two roles.

In not expecting more money and in his approach to the review, anyone who considers the problems of stretch faced by our armed forces must recognise that defence may require more funds if demands on and expectations of our armed forces grow. I heard what the Secretary of State had to say about the fine, but I noted the speed with which it was conceded and announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) made the telling point that it was the Chancellor who announced the decision about the royal yacht. I have a nasty feeling that the Chancellor or the Chief Secretary will announce more defence decisions, leaving us faced with a fait accompli.

The Secretary of State's assumption that a fine was involved and money was automatically going to be taken from his budget is an entirely new concept. I do not know who gave him that idea—I am sorry that I could not have an earlier consultation with him as I might have stiffened his back on that issue.

We are having the first defence debate of this Labour Government and it is no secret—everyone in the House knows it—that the country and the armed forces are suspicious of the Labour party on defence matters. It is no good thinking that if the manifesto states that the party believes in a strong defence that will meet all the fears and anxieties of those who serve in our armed forces. They are waiting to see what is actually done.

One of the Labour Government's first deeds involved the Chancellor saying that the Government would put more money into the health service this winter and that that money would come out of the defence budget. Anyone who knows the armed forces or who has talked to service men will realise that that act immediately

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reinforced their fear that it would turn out to be the start of a process. The announcement has been very damaging to morale.

Nobody in the armed forces or the Ministry of Defence is encouraged by the theory that the review will not be Treasury led. Being foreign policy led is not necessarily a great credential either. Let us imagine what would have happened if we had had a foreign policy-led review in earlier years. The Foreign Office did not foresee the Falklands or the Gulf wars. It never said, "Some 10 per cent. of our armed forces will have to be committed to peacekeeping in Bosnia in five years' time." The Foreign Office did not foresee the collapse of the Soviet Union or the iron curtain with anything like the speed at which they happened.

I think that the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) made the point that, quite apart from foreign policy, there must be a defence policy for this country. I did not go along with his quaint idea of amalgamating the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. I had not heard the idea before and I shall have to reflect on whether that is Liberal Democrat policy.

There is a core defence requirement. The Foreign Office does not always foresee the problem, but once it comes along, it expects the Ministry of Defence and our armed forces to do whatever is necessary. That is why this country needs a defence-led policy that does not depend on the best guess and the best forecast of the Foreign Office. I do not necessarily criticise the Foreign Office because I do not think that, given a list of the 10 most likely things to happen, many hon. Members would have marked off the Falklands war or said that 45,000 of our men and women in the armed forces would be involved in the Gulf in a high-intensity conflict. We sold our desert uniforms about three years before the Gulf war and I do not blame the Ministry of Defence for that—people thought that our desert days were over. I am merely showing the difficulty of trying to make predictions, and stating why we need to have a flexible and mobile defence policy to meet the different, and always unexpected, challenges.

Mr. Blunt: I agree with my right hon. Friend. Having served in both Departments, the one conclusion that I have reached is that the Foreign Office believes that it can spend the MOD's budget much better than the MOD.

Mr. King: My hon. Friend understands my point very well.

I wish to turn to a muddled bit of the Secretary of State's speech. I am not sure whether he was attacking "Options for Change" or saying that it was about right, but that that was where we should now stand. He spoke of it being inert and incoherent; he should be careful.

I warn Ministers to be careful about what they say about "Options for Change". It was masterminded by Lord Vincent, who later became the Chief of Defence Staff and was widely respected. He then went on to become an excellent chairman of the military committee of NATO. "Options for Change" was a two-headed operation. Its second head was the present permanent secretary, who was widely regarded as one of the brightest minds in the Ministry of Defence at the time.

"Options for Change" has effectively stood the test of time; it has not been reversed. The only significant change made to the options programme that I announced was that when the need for peacekeeping in Bosnia came on the horizon my successor, Malcolm Rifkind, took advantage of the provision within the programme which meant that, if necessary, the infantry level could be reviewed. We increased the number of infantry regiments by two battalions, from 38 to 40. Across the breadth of the Navy, the Air Force and the Army, the decisions recommended by Lord Vincent and Richard Mottram and their study groups in "Options for Change", and carried out with due dispatch, have all stood the test of time.

"Options for Change" was never intended to be a slippery slope down which people could slide. It was always intended that we should move from the cold war, when we faced the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact, to a post cold war situation where our military requirements were at a lower plateau—not on a slope, but at a lower plateau.

I accept that there was a case for "Front Line First". We had done much work on what our front-line strength should be, and there was a case for examining the rear echelon, much of the military and MOD estate, and a range of other matters—what might be called the MOD's overheads. But that having been done, I have been saying to my colleagues—and I made it clear to my colleagues when they were in government—that that was the position at which we should stop. One cannot maintain morale in the armed forces of a country or the calibre of personnel required unless one makes it clear that, having made changes, that then is the stability.

The one great disappointment that we all share involves the problem of stretch. My ambition in announcing the reduction in the armed forces was to make it clear that when we moved to a lower level of commitment we would achieve—which we had not achieved before—the 24-month gap between operational tours. For various reasons—Bosnia, the varying requirements of Northern Ireland and recruitment difficulties have quite a lot to do with it—we have not achieved that aim.

There was an acronym in the MOD which I inherited and which many people have forgotten about: MARILYN, as in Marilyn Monroe, which stands for manning and recruitment in the lean years of the nineties. It involves a demographic problem and it was one of the issues that we had to take into account in "Options for Change" when deciding on what we thought would be a sustainable level. MARILYN and the demographic problem of the number of people of recruitment age has meant that it has proved even more difficult than we anticipated in "Options for Change". I hope that we can approach the challenge of enhancing recruitment to the armed forces on a bipartisan basis to ensure that we can return to the 24-month operational tour interval, otherwise there will be difficulties in maintaining morale in the armed forces.

The second challenge that we face is both a constituency and a national issue. It involves procurement problems that flow from lower levels of demand in peacetime, when essential national capabilities cannot be maintained because there is an inadequate level of national procurement.

I have in my constituency a Royal Ordnance factory, which is the only producer of military explosive in this country and on which a significant amount of our ammunition supplies depend. Other hon. Members have Royal Ordnance factories in their constituencies and know that the issues currently affecting Royal Ordnance are a real problem. Royal Ordnance is a subsidiary of British Aerospace, which is currently embarking on mergers and collaborative arrangements with various companies in different fields. We have just talked about Eurofighter, but in the Royal Ordnance field the company is considering a possible merger with a French company. I accept that, in the defence field, there are often many good or even essential reasons for international collaboration, but this merger involves a possible arrangement whereby certain manufacture will come to this country and certain manufacture will go to France and one of the current proposals might lead to the only source of ammunition explosive being transferred to France.

The first requirement of any defence policy is national security. Forget our international alliances: although they are important and we must play our international role and collaborate with our allies where we can, at the end of the day, it is any Government's responsibility to ensure that we can maintain our essential national security, and ammunition explosive is an absolutely key national requirement. I was Secretary of State when one of our NATO allies refused to supply us with ammunition under the collaborative arrangement that applied within NATO. They were able to claim that it did not apply because the Gulf war was not a NATO matter.

In the case of France, I am conscious that, no matter how many agreements have been signed, the French were not in agreement with us over the Falklands—as we know, Exocet was one of the biggest threats we faced in the Falklands—and nor were they initially in agreement with us over the Gulf war. There was a significant pause before the French Government decided to join in and it is no secret that my then opposite number at the French Ministry of Defence was also the chairman of the Franco-Iraqi friendship society, which slightly compromised his position. Only this week at the United Nations, where we and the United States are pressing for a tightening of sanctions against Iraq in connection with Mr. Ekeus and his efforts to get greater co-operation from the Iraqis, the French have opposed and obstructed our efforts because they are hoping to do a new deal on oil and starting to establish closer trading relationships.

France is our ally and a friend with whom we work closely, but it is impossible to say that we will always have an identity of interest on foreign policy. In addition, it has to be said that even when the Government of France are in favour and showing full co-operation, the capacity of French lorry drivers, farmers or others to make damn sure that supplies do not move down French roads or along French railways is legendary.

I am glad that the Under-Secretary of State is present, because he can speak on behalf of his right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement, with whom I have been in close contact about these issues. This matter makes both a constituency point and a wider national point: we must ensure that certain capabilities are not lost altogether, even though they are less required at present. During the Gulf war, we found ourselves in a high-intensity conflict in which our Royal Air Force and our artillery fired quantities of ammunition and munitions that were beyond the scale of our previous expectations. We have a duty to our armed forces—to which I pay tribute as has every other hon. Member who has spoken—to ensure that, if we put them in harm's way, they have the resources they need.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. King: No—I hope the hon. Gentleman will excuse me.

My point is that we face a difficult procurement issue. I have suggested to Royal Ordnance and British Aerospace that they present to the Ministry of Defence an assessment of the cost of ensuring that we at least retain production capability. Although our current requirements may be low, we must retain in this country capabilities in line with our essential national security. I have great respect and admiration for those with whom I worked at the Ministry of Defence, but I am not sure that they appreciate the challenge presented by issues of this nature. Our ordnance requirement is one of those issues and a new approach is needed.

7.25 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I am delighted to follow the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), who gave some of the vital statistics of the Ministry of Defence. He was a distinguished Secretary of State for Defence and a courageous Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I appreciated the speech made by the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), who made a measured set of remarks and, in a low-key delivery, evidenced some considerable attachment to principle.

Listening to the speech of the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), I was reminded of those days when I was on the squash court with him and, now as then, he was gentlemanly in his proceedings. However, when he attacked spinning, he hit his own wicket, and his remarks about the Welsh Assembly were inexplicable. I shall pick up on his point about the jury being out on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. My right hon. Friend has made an excellent start and I have no doubt whatever that in the months and years ahead he will continue to dominate the important brief that he now holds.

I thank my right hon. Friend for his open and sincere speech, notwithstanding the many interventions that he had to field. I shall support his objectives of efficiency, value for money and flexibility. He made an historic set of remarks when he ran up the flag of equality of opportunity; I support him in that and wish him well. I shall watch with interest how he translates the ideal into practice. What is certain is that, for many years, our nation has been subjected to a huge social revolution, which is on-going and incomplete. We would be foolish to think that the armed forces could be insulated from the effects of that revolution.

I should like to express my gratitude to the junior Ministers. To me and my constituents, they have been very accessible. During the few months in which the Government have been in office, I have been able to take at least three deputations to see each of the Ministers who sit in this House. I am grateful for the time that they have given to the worries and hopes of my constituents. Within three weeks of taking office, my hon. Friend the Minister

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for the Armed Forces met three of my constituents who suffer seriously from Gulf war illness. It was instructive to see a Defence Minister personally, in his room, attempting to come to grips with the problems experienced by Mr. Ritchie Turnbull, Mr. Mark Doyle and Mr. David Robertson. Each of those men is ill; each was a good service man who gave his best for his country in the Gulf. Now, I find them to be in a deteriorating state of health and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for giving them a full hour of his time. I hope that those three constituents will obtain the best treatment and get full compensation in the fulness of time.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that many people in that category are worried that the years are passing by and they could be out of term very quickly for any claims, on which they might be entitled to receive compensation?

Mr. Jones: That is a shrewd intervention. It is my fear, too. I choose my words carefully: at least one of my constituents is seriously ill, and he has received medical advice that he urgently needs a variety of treatments. I want him to make a full recovery, but I know that he is seriously ill. I accept all that the hon. Gentleman implies, therefore, and I would make that point as well. I am sure that other right hon. and hon. Members will have that in mind.

Regarding heavy lift, many of my constituents are employed by British Aerospace and by the Airbus company. More than 3,000 of my constituents make the wings of the Airbus aircraft. They are a superb work force, highly skilled and loyal, and they meet every challenge successfully. They hope to be able to make the wing of the future large aircraft.

I ask the Government: what is the status of the future large aircraft? How are our Government negotiating and working alongside, for example, the Governments of Germany and of France in that important project? Many thousands of families in north-east Wales, in the north-west, in Cheshire and especially in my constituency are anxious to have the answers about that big project.

I am bewildered by the fact that the C130J is behind time by, I believe, 17 months. I did not want the contract to go to the specific company that it went to—of course, I was biased because my constituents have a strong interest in the future large aircraft—but I am perplexed by the delay in delivery, and I believe that there are problems also in airworthiness, if that is not too simplistic a statement. My constituents would be appalled if the future large aircraft were not built and our Government bought the C17 instead. That is a constituency point, but it is also a European, and indeed a national, point. I feel no guilt whatever in making it on behalf of a superb work force.

I also have the Raytheon aerospace factory in my constituency. I emphasise to the Government that in the constituency we have the unique skills and expertise, developed over many years, for the manufacture of special commission aircraft, and that we are relying totally on the ASTOR—airborne stand-off radar—project to keep the skills base and associated jobs alive, for the benefit not only of Wales, the north-west and my constituency but, in this instance, on so massive a project, of the country.

I want to be sure that the Government will make every effort to ensure that the ASTOR project goes to the team offering the best technical solution, the lowest risk and the best value for money. I believe that to be the Raytheon team; I am entitled to say that because I genuinely believe that it is not only a very important constituency matter, but important nationally.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith), one of the parliamentary private secretaries in the Department, has visited us. He came to my constituency, met the Raytheon Jets work force and toured the plant. He made a good impression, and we told him that we needed the ASTOR project and that we wanted to service the Department's Dominie aircraft. I repeat that message today.

There is in my constituency what I believe to be the best maintenance unit in Europe—RAF Sealand. Nearly 1,700 uniformed and civilian staff work there. It makes a massive contribution to the economy of my constituency, and the skills there are unbelievable. The unit's record during the Falklands war—when it worked around the clock—and the Gulf war was superb. I want the Department to invest further in the work of RAF Sealand. I find that, whenever the unit is challenged, it comes up with the goods. I invite the Secretary of State to visit RAF Sealand at an appropriate time to see how it works and how it has managed to keep our marvellous fliers in the air in several wars.

In terms of research and development, historically, our nation has neglected to invest sufficiently in the aerospace industry as it affects the responsibilities of the Ministry of Defence. I know from British Aerospace that, annually, there are about £5 billion of export sales, in which 400,000 jobs in Britain are involved. If in the next century we wish to maintain a lead over our competitors, indeed over our potential enemies, should there be any—surely there will be—the Government, not simply the Ministry, must address the problem of research and development.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, my last point refers to the contribution made to defence matters by British Aerospace. I am told that it has an order book of £20 billion—a massive amount; that it is involved in 28 collaborative ventures throughout the world; that its annual sales are equivalent to about £7 billion; and that about 72 nations are its customers. Most important for the future, as for now, there are 47,000 employees at British Aerospace. Happily, it has taken on about 500 graduates in recent times. Above all, that company now represents Britain's largest reservoir of skilled employees.

If we took away the company of British Aerospace and the aerospace industry, Britain would be in desperate straits. I emphasise to my right hon. and hon. Friends the Ministers the fact that they should never neglect those issues.

7.37 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for calling me on the first day of this two-day defence debate. I have three points to make, to which I would greatly appreciate a response from the Minister. One concerns the ballistic missile defence of Europe. The second concerns the threat to our defences posed by the so-called millennium bug—the inability of most computer systems to recognise the year 2000. Thirdly, I shall repeat to the Government the appeal that

I made to the previous Government, to inquire into the use—I would call it the abuse—of young national service men in research in Porton Down in the 1950s, which has permanently impaired their health.

I pursued the issue of ballistic missile defence in the annual defence debates in the House in 1994 and 1995, when I shared my concerns with hon. Members about the fact that neither this country nor Europe had a firm, clear or coherent policy on ballistic missile defence. I regret to say that that remains the case today. As the threat has come even closer now, I assume that the Government's strategic defence review includes missile defence in its terms of reference.

In the March edition of *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, the assistant director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Terence Taylor, is quoted as saying:

> "There is no coherent European view on missile defence. There is a confused situation about what is the real threat and what we would defend in Europe, and who is European. If you look into the budgets you don't find anything."

If that is true, it is very alarming.

There has of course been a missile threat to western Europe for the past 55 years, ever since the Nazis developed cruise missiles—the V1s, which killed 5,000 British civilians—and then ballistic missiles—the V2s, which killed 2,500 Londoners. Today that missile technology which the Germans pioneered is more easily obtainable than ever before and it has been used several times in recent years. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) has just referred to the two British ships sunk by Exocet missiles during the Falklands war; and during one phase of the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq rained down missiles on Tehran, killing 2,000 citizens. Then, during the Gulf war, Saddam Hussein used his strongest card to attack Israeli towns and an American base in Saudi Arabia—his Al Hussein-Scud missiles. In March this year, China fired four ballistic missiles into the sea near Taiwan during the latter's presidential elections. Although that did not intimidate the voters, it caused Lloyd's of London to refuse to insure any ship going to Taiwan. That certainly damaged its economy, and that of Japan, temporarily.

We should not ignore those recent events. Missiles have been used to destroy, to threaten and to intimidate. They can affect whole economies and foreign policies. Today a growing number of third-world Governments are buying or developing missiles, which are easier to man and cheaper to acquire than squadrons of fighter aircraft. According to Lancaster university, 35 non-NATO countries have ballistic missiles, and 18 of them are capable of installing nuclear, biological or chemical warheads on them.

As the House will know, the greatest menace are the five rogue regimes, some of which help each other's missile programmes: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria and North Korea. Fired from Libya, North Korean No-dong missiles with a range of 700 miles would threaten southern Europe, while the Taepo Dong two-stage rockets that it is developing, with a range of 2,500 to 4,000 miles, would threaten all the capitals of Europe—including London.

How long will we observe those developments without responding to them with a clear policy? Three years ago, when I referred to those developments in a report to the Western European Union, I caused a flurry by suggesting a worst case scenario of Algeria falling to the Islamic fundamentalists. That could have a domino effect throughout the coast of north Africa, with Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt falling to equally hostile regimes that would quickly be armed by Libya and Iran, with missiles trained on Europe as well as Israel.

All that could happen within weeks. No doubt the United States would seek to intervene; but who can say, as the carnage in Algeria continues every week, that such a scenario is implausible? The Lancaster university team also estimates that 67 non-NATO countries possess cruise missiles. Any future western rapid reaction force, including British forces, in an out-of-area operation will now need far greater protection than was provided during Desert Storm.

I look forward to the Minister's response to four questions about ballistic missile defences which I want to put to him. First, what is the Department's response to the British Aerospace-led pre-feasibility study on missile defence hardware? I believe that the study was reported to the previous Government earlier this year. Secondly, will the Minister take Britain into the medium extended air defence system project, with the United States, Germany and Italy, for international co-operation and cost sharing in the development of anti-missile systems; and will he urge France to return to the project?

Thirdly, will the Minister encourage NATO to be the instrument for developing and deploying a European ballistic missile defence system—the system for which Michael Portillo called in his speech in Brussels a year ago?

Finally, during a WEU visit to the United States in July, I was encouraged to learn of two new significant developments in missile defence—the first such for several years. One was a United States air force contract to Boeing Lockheed Martin to develop an airborne laser to shoot down ballistic missiles shortly after launch—the ideal time to shoot them down, while the missiles are still over the launching country and at their most vulnerable.

The second significant development is a laser defence system known as the infra-red advanced chemical laser which, either ground based or satellite based, would defend satellite systems from missile attack. Both projects, using lasers as weapons, run contrary to existing treaties. In the light of the perceived threats to which the development of those projects is a response, I must ask the Minister whether the treaties should now be renegotiated.

The House will recall the concern that I have expressed in several speeches and countless questions during the past two years about the consequences of most computer systems not recognising the year 2000, for this country and the rest of the world. I hope that the House will give a Second Reading to my Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance) Bill on Friday 28 November; it will do much to protect British business from those consequences.

As Governments and private businesses are discovering, although tackling the problem is a comparatively simple task for a computer programmer, the real issue is the sheer scale of the problem: there is not enough time left to avoid difficulties. It is a question of priorities. Earlier this year the *Daily Mail*, reporting the National Audit Office's report on the problem, warned that vital defence and weapons systems could suffer breakdowns and military computer systems could stop

[Mr. David Atkinson]

functioning altogether, leaving Britain defenceless at the turn of the century. It quoted Michael Clark of the Centre for Defence Studies as saying:

> "In the worst possible scenario we could have unguided missiles flying around—or none at all. Anti-tank missiles could hit the wrong target, or simply not fire. We have no way of knowing exactly what will happen."

I hope that the Minister will tell us this evening how the Department is responding, and that he can assure us that our defence systems will remain fully operational at the turn of the century. I have a copy of the United States Department of Defence year 2000 management plan, showing the Americans' response to the situation. Does our Department have something similar? I hope, too, that he will say what discussions he has had with our allies to make sure that they are preparing for the problem as well. Even if our systems have been made millennium compliant, if other systems with which they are connected are not, ours will crash along with them.

Exactly a year ago in an Adjournment debate, I drew attention to the position of certain former national service men, including my constituent Michael Paynter, who volunteered for research into the common cold at the chemical and biological defence establishment in Porton Down in the 1950s and whose health has been permanently destroyed by the experience. The then Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), refused my request for a public inquiry. I have now written to his successor with the same request and was delighted to learn from his reply last month that he has taken the trouble to meet representatives of the Porton Down volunteers association. I thank him for the personal interest that he has taken in the matter, but he has not told me the action that he intends to take in the light of his meeting. I think that the Under-Secretary of State for Defence was also present at that meeting. As Ministers will know, the matter is now being taken before the European Court of Human Rights. Is it not better to let the British Government deal openly with the matter than to have them respond grudgingly to the court's finding?

7.49 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): It is good to be back. The parliamentary summer recess was unacceptably long.

I am pleased that we are having this wide-ranging defence debate. I have enjoyed listening to a number of contributions, although I may not have agreed with all that has been said. I listened closely to the speech of the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). Bearing in mind the spirit of ecumenicism between the Prime Minister and the leader of the Liberal Democrat party, I feel that I can safely say that I agreed with everything that he said. I make no apology for flagging that up.

The shadow Secretary of State referred to NATO enlargement and complained that there was no great debate on the issue in this country. To an extent, he and his colleagues are to blame. Regrettably, the only debate that I recall being held on the Floor of the House was initiated by the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) in private Members' time. Part of the reason why this extremely important issue is not discussed in the House is that the House does not ratify treaties. I hope that, when the Government discuss their constitutional agenda, they will look at the wider issue of the House being able to confirm or ratify treaties or amendments to treaties. That would be good in general and would ensure that we had, in the House and elsewhere, a full debate about the important matter of NATO enlargement, which I whole-heartedly support in principle.

I very much welcome the fact that the Madrid summit gave Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic the prospect of early admission to NATO. My only regret is that Slovenia was left out for no other reason than that existing NATO members decided—for reasons that I accept—to tell Romania that it should wait for some time and, rather than leave Romania to face its disappointment alone, felt that they must leave out 1 million people in Slovenia to smooth over Romania's disappointment.

I welcome the extension of NATO because it is a matter of right. It is 51 years since Winston Churchill spoke at Fulton, Missouri and said:

> "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an Iron Curtain has descended across the Continent behind which we must refer to it as the Soviet sphere."

What were the past 50 years about if not to acknowledge that, when countries are free, they are entitled to join an association of free nations? For half a century, we were telling the peoples of central Europe to look over the wall at how wonderful a market economy was. When communism collapsed, the Warsaw pact finished, the wall came down, the barbed wire was rolled up and they asked whether they could join the club, some people said, "Hang on a minute, not so fast." That is totally unacceptable. It is a moral issue that we should be able to invite countries that can demonstrate a robust and enduring parliamentary democracy into the NATO club, and we took that first step at the Madrid summit.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), who is no longer in his place, referred to the Baltic countries which can legitimately aspire to join NATO. We must not, however, devalue or dilute the security guarantees, which is why the extension of NATO should be taken in geographical stages. Another criterion for new NATO members is that they must make a commitment not just to parliamentary democracy but to internal human rights. At least one Baltic state has some distance to go before demonstrating that it can accommodate its minorities within a democratic constitutional structure. That is an important incentive or carrot. The aspiration of joining NATO has contributed to the rapprochement between Hungary and Romania, so it is good that nations are told that they can join defence organisations—an important symbol of democracy—if they are prepared to ensure the robustness of their parliamentary institutions.

I welcome this debate for a number of other reasons. I want to place on record my gratitude to the Minister for the Armed Forces for his initiative in the campaign with which I have been associated to seek pardons for soldiers executed in the Great War on charges ranging from cowardice to desertion, sleeping at their posts, throwing away arms and hitting a superior officer. He agreed that there is now widespread support for acknowledgement by the state that injustice was done to those men, albeit a long time ago. I welcome the fact that he has referred the matter back to the various sections involved within the Ministry and I look forward to a positive response. It will be welcomed by the men's families and the few remaining veterans from the Great War and, overwhelmingly, by British public opinion.

In the last Parliament, an early-day motion was signed by the majority of Back Benchers—perhaps even by a majority of the House—calling for a veterans Minister. I acknowledge that the present Government have gone some way, within the distribution of portfolios in the Ministry of Defence and other Departments, to meet the needs, aspirations and interests of people who have served in the armed forces and their widows or dependants. Nevertheless, I hope that a message will go back to the Prime Minister that there is a case for a Minister with a clear remit, among his other duties, to protect and promote the interests of veterans, their widows and dependants. It could be along the lines of the Minister for Sport. In all Administrations with a Minister for Sport, the Minister has had other responsibilities as well—for water, disasters and so on. This country, like most others, should have a Minister for veterans' affairs. I hope that the Prime Minister will consider that.

There are many veterans' issues. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) mentioned an ex-service man who volunteered for Porton Down. There is also Gulf war syndrome. I have taken a renewed interest in the disadvantage suffered by some war widows and war pensioners whose local authorities do not disregard their pensions in assessing housing benefit entitlement. I give a trailer for the Bill that I shall present on 5 November to try to end the exercise of discretion by a minority of local authorities. That is unfair both to pensioners in those areas and to local authorities that exercise their full discretion under the law.

I was pleased to go, during the recess, with a number of hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), to HMS Invincible on the initiative of Captain Clare, the commanding officer. We spent a day at sea seeing and experiencing the great skills and dexterity of the craft and its crew, which allowed us to understand more fully the importance of the facilities of that amphibious craft and, if I may use the words of the commanding officer on that occasion, the capacity of a carrier like the Invincible to be on a "global neighbourhood watch". I thought that that was an apt description of our rôle and of the capacity of our carriers and amphibious craft.

It is interesting that some 10 per cent. of the crew of Invincible are women. It was clear that that was not seen as a problem by the commanders or by the men and women who serve on Invincible. There was a period when that might have been novel, and when those women would have been pioneers, and there might have been some difficulties, but once one gets over the problem and embraces it, the issue goes away. *[Laughter.]* Hon. Members might find that a matter for levity, but I think that it is serious.

The shadow Secretary of State said that he gave a cautious welcome to what the Minister said earlier in his announcement about women in the armed forces. I thought that the shadow Secretary of State was less than generous. Intellectually, he knows that what was announced today was entirely sensible, demonstrably fair and long overdue. He knows that, but he has behind him some Blimps who cannot comprehend that a substantial proportion of armed forces roles can be filled by the female gender. It is a great pity that he could not say more robustly that he agreed with the Government on the matter.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I share the hon. Gentleman's admiration for the crew that day. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) was not giving a cautious welcome in that sense. There are problems, and I shall refer to some of them tomorrow—for example, the need to review the Army, Air Force and naval discipline Acts and to consolidate them into one. That opportunity has been missed for a decade. When there is joint service, as on that aircraft carrier, there are real problems concerning the different moral codes of the three services. That has caused genuine concern in many cases.

Mr. Mackinlay: The matters to which the hon. Gentleman refers are not problems; they are matters that must be addressed. They are not reasons for not welcoming the principle of the announcement by the Secretary of State. I shall not labour the point, but the Conservatives could have embraced it more generously this evening.

Also during the recess I have been signed up, if that is the correct term, to the parliamentary armed forces scheme. I am grateful that the Minister for the Armed Forces has decided to extend the number of places for hon. Members, and I encourage all hon. Members to take advantage of the extension. It is enormous fun, but that is a secondary issue. More importantly, it is extremely good in terms of briefing and allows us to understand the philosophy, camaraderie and skills of our armed forces personnel and the equipment that they use. I welcome my secondment to the Royal Marines.

My family fell about laughing when they heard that I was connected with the Royal Marines, then my wife inquired about insurance. However, I have been in safe hands. It has been well worth while and I am grateful to the commandant-general, Major-General Pennefather, and his colleagues for facilitating my visits to Royal Marines establishments.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): It may not be known in the House, and it should be known by the hon. Gentleman, that tomorrow is the 333rd anniversary of the formation of the Royal Marines. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and the House will join me in congratulating the corps—in which I am proud to have served—on a fantastic record, second to none, in defending Britain for centuries.

Mr. Mackinlay: This is an occasion on which I am delighted to have given way. It is pertinent for the hon. Gentleman to draw the attention of the House to that anniversary. I saw an absurd press report—in *The Daily Telegraph*, I think, so I do not take it tremendously seriously—of a suggestion that there should be a merger between the Royal Marines and the Parachute Regiment. I would welcome some reassurance from Ministers today or tomorrow that that was utter nonsense, which I am sure that it is. It would be important to those serving in the Parachute Regiment, the Royal Marines commandos and people associated with them for that nonsense to be put aside.

[Mr. Mackinlay]

One of my visits was to the Royal Marines school of music, whose relocation to Hampshire was the subject of considerable debate at the time of "Options for Change" and subsequently in the House. I can report to the House that the school is well accommodated in suitable accommodation, and standards are being more than maintained. Under Lieutenant-Colonel Waterson, great efforts are being made to offer the men and women in the Marine band opportunities to qualify for music degrees during their period of service. That is a relatively new development, but it is in line with what is happening elsewhere in the armed forces, which I welcome. Service men and women are to be given increasing opportunities to attain civil qualifications, which will give them a sense of achievement and help them with their later careers.

My activities this summer have reinforced in my mind the importance of the flexibility and benefits that the United Kingdom derives from its carriers and other amphibious facilities around the world. That is important politically and militarily. Often, they can be deployed in advance of political decisions, so that Governments can be told that our armed forces are already in place, whether for humanitarian purposes, to rescue people in dire circumstances, as happened in the Caribbean this summer, or for peacekeeping purposes, to intervene where that is urgently required.

In the past five or six years, our forces have been involved in numerous peacekeeping operations and in providing humanitarian relief. All too often, those activities go unreported. The television cameras are often not there, and our forces are taken for granted. Hon. Members expect our armed forces to have that capacity. It is important for our role in the world that we have the facility to intervene in troubled areas or in areas where a crisis has been brought about by natural disaster.

Will Ministers assure us that, in addition to HMS Ocean, which is being constructed at Barrow-in-Furness and will be a major additional facility enlarging our capacity to mount amphibious operations, replacements will be ordered for Fearless and Intrepid? It is important that we should have such capacity, for the reasons that I outlined, both military and political.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I also spent some time on HMS Invincible as part of the Commons defence study group. I endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments about the flexibility of aircraft carriers. Will the Minister consider not just Fearless, Intrepid and Ocean, but the Invincible class itself? Those are now old ships and we must start working on replacements for them as well.

Mr. Mackinlay: That is entirely correct. I am sold on the necessity for the United Kingdom to have the capacity to protect itself through its amphibious ability. A score or 25 years ago, we might have abandoned that facility. That would have been profoundly foolish, and one of the great historic mistakes.

Reference was made to the fact that our armed forces are under strength. The Royal Marines were short by 296 commandos in September 1997, and there are many thousands of vacant places in the Army, Navy and Air Force. I believe that the move to tri-service recruitment shops has not proved successful. I have taken the opportunity—I invite other hon. Members to do likewise—to interview young men and women in our secondary schools to discover whether their appetites have been whetted regarding careers in the armed forces. I find that the concept is put to very few young men and women who have the physical and mental capacity to serve in our armed forces. With a bit more effort and imagination, perhaps we could fill the vacant posts in our armed forces with good-quality youngsters. I hope that the Government will introduce some initiatives in that regard.

There is another area worth mentioning in a defence debate, which I wish to raise. I understand why, in light of the IRA and security situations, it was decided that men and women in the armed forces should not wear their uniforms in public. However, I believe that that was an appeasement to terrorism to some extent, and I suspect that those who wish to murder members of our armed forces will always identify them in any event. If the ceasefire endures—I hope that it will—perhaps the Government will review that policy. Unlike people in other countries, the British public do not see their armed forces in uniform—which may also have a knock-on effect in recruitment terms. I hope that the matter will be reviewed in this new climate. Even if no instruction were given, perhaps individuals in our armed forces could have the option of wearing their uniforms in public.

I suppose that the kernel of this debate is the armed forces review. I am somewhat saddened that, although it is considered all right for the Conservatives to conduct an armed forces review, apparently it is not appropriate for a new Government to do likewise—despite the fact that the Labour party has been out of office for 18 years. It seems both prudent and fair that Government should have the opportunity to review and take stock of our defence position.

We have been told that it is a foreign policy-led review, and I shall dwell on that point for a moment. I welcome that approach. I am aware of our foreign policy requirements in broad-brush terms, as well as the expectations of the people of this country and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I am at one with the Secretary of State on this point: if we have foreign policy commitments—of which we are all familiar—we must vote the means of fulfilling them. I agreed with everything that the Secretary of State—who, unfortunately, is not in his place—said. However, before he gets too excited, I must add that my election address did not contain the word "new"—I removed it completely.

Over the weekend, I noticed one or two of my colleagues who describe themselves as "new Labour" postulating in the media that there is scope for making major savings from Britain's armed forces. I do not share that view—especially if we are to maintain foreign policy expectations. At times of crisis, such as a natural disaster or genocide, Members on both sides of the House are the first to demand that the British Government—whether Conservative or Labour—intervene. By and large, I agree with that. However, we must remember—to put it bluntly and crudely—that, if we want to maintain our present role and capacity in the world, we must will the means. That does not come cheap. While there may be some opportunities to readjust the configuration of our role, we cannot use that possibility to support a reduction in the overall resources available to our armed forces. I am at one with the Secretary of State on that issue. Through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I tell those who think that they can have their cake and eat it that that is not possible.

My penultimate point concerns the volunteer and cadet forces. My county of Essex—if I may be parochial for a moment—has only 459 all ranks in the Territorial Army. I believe that the county deserves more not because I am from Essex but because I think that our territorial armed forces should be distributed evenly throughout the country. Essex is close to London, near the motorway and major transportation networks and has a substantial population. I think that there should be no further reduction in the Territorial Army or in volunteer forces generally, and certainly no such reduction in my county. There will be some opposition if that occurs.

I acknowledge the great service provided by the volunteers who run our cadet forces. There is a case for examining the funding of those forces. Funding should be maintained, but distributed more equitably in order to ensure that the three cadet forces are resourced sufficiently so that they may continue and enhance their important community role.

The shadow Secretary of State is now in his place. He referred to NATO and I hope that, contrary to his better judgment, he might find time to read in *Hansard* my references to his comments earlier. As I have said, I feel strongly about that subject. It is a matter of fact that the United States Senate will have to approve the widening of NATO membership, and I hope that it will not fail to approve that increase. If the United States did not approve the widening of NATO membership as recommended by the Madrid summit, I believe that it would be one of the few foolhardy acts committed by that country and comparable to its failure to join the League of Nations.

For all its faults and deficiencies, the United States has a proud defence record: its long arm reached across the Atlantic during some of our most desperate times. The United States has sustained and led NATO for more than half a century, and it would be a great tragedy if it were to fail to finish the job by extending NATO membership to the new, free, robust parliamentary democracies in central Europe. I hope that remarks in this place and the actions of our Ministers elsewhere will encourage United States senators to approve that important historic event and achieve an extension of democracy and security in Europe.

8.17 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I would be negligent if I failed to mention the contribution that the armed services have made in Northern Ireland over more than a quarter of a century. During that time, hundreds of young men and women have died in the defence of democracy and many thousands have been injured. The devotion to duty demonstrated by those young men and women is quite remarkable, given the fact that successive Governments have been without any coherent or cohesive policy on how to deal with terrorism in Northern Ireland.

It is certainly no compliment to the courage and discipline of those young people that we now have the IRA, represented by unreconstructed terrorists, at the table of democracy. However, I shall not deal with that matter during my brief speech tonight; I want to concentrate on how the Ministry of Defence acts and reacts in respect of this nation's arms procurement so as to sustain the interests of our defence industry.

I move immediately to the development of our air-to-air capability. When the decision was made to equip our forces with Apache helicopters, it was recognised that they would require an effective air-to-air capability to defend themselves against enemy helicopters and other aircraft. There was what was called a mandatory option to equip with Starstreak or anything better. At that time, Starstreak had not been accepted into service, but it is now successfully deployed with United Kingdom forces as a vehicle-based, ground-to-air, very short-range missile system.

I do not need to remind hon. Members of the advantage that Starstreak's laser-guided, high-velocity missile system holds over infra-red systems—it is effective in typical battle-scene scenarios where there is clutter such as smoke, tree obstructions or heat sources. Starstreak has been designed to be immune to countermeasures, including jamming, flares, chaff or electronic devices. Its high velocity enables engagement times to be short.

Air-to-air Starstreak can take full advantage of the target acquisition range provided by the Apache helicopter's longbow radar and target acquisition and designation system—TADS. As it is not a fire-and-forget infra-red system, there is also a reduced risk of mistakes such as friendly fire, as the missile can be destroyed or steered away from the target following launch if the target is found not to be hostile.

The possible alternative to Starstreak—the United States' Hughes Stinger infra-red system—has been declared ineffective in the air-to-air role, whereas Starstreak had, by the end of last year, successfully completed phase one of a joint US-UK evaluation, with six Starstreak missiles successfully fired from the helicopter in the hover and forward flight positions.

Phase two, encompassing the integration of Starstreak's laser beam guidance system with the Apache's TADS and full integration with the programme, together with the recent selection of the Apache by the Ministry of Defence, could pave the way for joint missile procurement and inter-operability of common US-UK equipment. Between the US and the UK, we are talking about some 900 helicopters.

I come now to my point about the Ministry of Defence. Quite simply, it is not punchy enough; it is not positive in promoting this country's defence industry in the face of very aggressive opposition. Potentially, Starstreak is a huge winner and it could be ready for service within two to three years in its air-to-air role, yet the United States finds the MOD ambivalent and without enthusiasm on the issue of whether we are committed to our own system. There is a huge Stinger lobby in the US. It is therefore essential that Starstreak receives full UK support. The current perception in the US is that the MOD is not firm enough in its support for Starstreak and is simply waiting for the US to pay for and make the selection decision. That can only assist the Stinger lobby.

I encourage the Minister and the Secretary of State, who has just resumed his seat, urgently to address the fact that improvements in the ground-based air defence capability at short range and very short range are required through the introduction of a co-ordinating command and control structure working to individual fire unit level. No such change in the infrastructure of our ground-based air defence has yet occurred. In order to bring significant gains in the efficiency of our air defence assets—I refer

[Mr. Ken Maginnis]

specifically to Rapier and Starstreak—the sophistication of co-ordination in command and control needs to match that of other European nations.

The introduction, through technology insertion, of a command and control capability in the short range and very short range air defence systems would provide scope to increase the efficiency of the weapon systems, to allow the most cost-effective weapons mix to be deployed, to provide instantly the recognised air picture and local air picture to the fire units, and to ensure that Britain's air defence capability is compatible with the continuing adoption of such digitisation programmes by other NATO countries.

Finally, I want to touch on the airborne stand-off radar—ASTOR—programme, which is essential to the defence of our nation. Do the Government still regard it as a high priority? I point out to the Minister that, apart from my regional interest in the programme, it incorporates significant national interest. Of the two aircraft platforms proposed for the ASTOR programme, only one—the Bombardier Global Express—has significantly high British content. Shorts design and manufacture more than 25 per cent. of the aircraft in Belfast.

Following the loss of 1,000 jobs due to Fokker's collapse last year, this programme is of major importance to employment at Shorts and other UK companies. Up to 700 jobs in Belfast will depend on Global Express at full production. Other major British suppliers include Lucas Aerospace, Messier-Dowty, Westland and BMW Rolls-Royce, which supply the engines.

Due consideration should be given by the MOD and the Department of Trade and Industry to the high UK work content, in addition to the advantages that the all new design Global Express aircraft offers. Because of its all new design, Global Express offers major advantages to the MOD in that it provides 25 per cent. more cabin space with outstanding capacity for flexibility and development of interior layout. It incorporates the most advanced proven technologies available with superior systems, three times the amount of electrical power, superior performance and low operating costs.

If selected, Shorts would also manufacture components for the modified ASTOR aircraft, thereby providing even more jobs. There would be major export opportunities for Global Express, with more advantages available to the British companies that I have mentioned.

I believe and I hope that the Secretary of State agrees with me—although he is not paying much attention at the moment—that this nation's effective defence depends on our vital defence industry being maintained and given all the support and encouragement that other nations appear only too willing to give their industries.

I shall end as I began: we depend on our young men and women in uniform, but integral to our defence must be a healthy defence industry. I hope that the Secretary of State will pay due attention to that.

8.29 pm

Mrs. Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): In rising to make my first speech, I should like to say something of my constituency. It is particularly relevant that I should make my maiden speech in the annual debate on defence, representing as I do one of the leading defence constituencies in the country.

Called Sudtone in the Domesday book, Plymouth's original harbour is still called Sutton harbour. A developing trade and the shipment of armies to France led to its early growth, and by the 16th century it was flourishing and the home port to many Elizabethan adventurers, including Sir Walter Raleigh, who set off for Virginia from Plymouth, and Sir Francis Drake, who sailed with the English fleet from Plymouth to defend the country against attack from the Spanish armada in 1588.

Sutton harbour is now flourishing on a different basis as home to the fastest growing fish market in Europe. The Hoe, on its southern waterfront, is dominated by the citadel, built by Charles II, and now home to the 29th Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery. The east of my constituency is bounded by the royal dockyard, which was started in the late 17th century and became the focus for the town of Plymouth Dock, renamed Plymouth Devonport in 1824.

As a naval port, Plymouth has played a key role in the defence of the country. Partly as a result of this, during world war two, the city suffered severe bomb damage from air raids. Indeed, it was the most bombed city in England.

At the entrance to Sutton harbour, the walls carry plaques recording the historic voyages that started from Plymouth. They also include many to those who died at sea while fishing or working in the merchant service. Perhaps most famous among the voyagers are the Mayflower pilgrims, who finally set sail from Plymouth in 1620 for the new world. The plaque recording the pilgrim fathers was put up in 1955, but it was only in the early 1980s that the names of the pilgrim mothers—essential, I would have thought, to the new world—were added.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the potential huge movements of people in Europe, and some of the plaques at Sutton harbour mark the departure of some 450,000 people to Australia and New Zealand in the 18th and 19th centuries.

I was fortunate enough to visit Australia during the recess as a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation. We were able to see at first hand the impact that emigrants from the south-west made in establishing the roots of what is now a flourishing country. The links with Tasmania, as shown in place names, are particularly strong: Devonport, Exeter, Launceston, Staverton, Tamar and Cornwall, to name but a few.

We visited the Australian national war memorial in Canberra, which reminded us of the strong defence links with our Commonwealth allies. I should like to record my thanks to the many Australian members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the staff of the various Parliaments in New South Wales, Canberra and Tasmania, and our own high commission staff. They all contributed to making our visit purposeful and memorable.

The historic landings at Plymouth are less well recorded, with one notable exception. In 1956, Plymouth trade unionists put a plaque on the harbour wall to mark the homecoming of four of the Tolpuddle martyrs who landed back in Plymouth in March 1838, having survived their exile in Australia.

Our waterfront has rich associations that have earned the city the titles of cradle of the Commonwealth and springboard for the new world. There are indeed some 40 places in the world that take their name from Plymouth. We are working to celebrate that millennial heritage in the regeneration of our waterfront. "The Shell Guide to Britain" refers to our waterfront as one of the premier waterfronts in the world.

The Mayflower steps, on the other hand, marking where the pilgrims left from, have been called the most underdeveloped heritage site in the country. We have much to do, and I hope to play a leading part in ensuring that the citizens and visitors of the next millennium know the role that the city of Plymouth played in defence in worldwide terms during the millennium.

Many famous men have been associated with Plymouth—explorers, adventurers, discoverers and scientists. Plymouth has also had some remarkable, courageous and dedicated women. They include several scientists, nurses and doctors. Dr. Mary Parke made her contribution in the 1940s to marine science, working in Plymouth's Marine Biological Association, a forerunner of our world-famous Plymouth marine laboratory, which now employs 200 people in my constituency.

Plymouth's medical women played a significant role in the services. Eight of them, trained under pioneer nurse Priscilla Sellon, worked with Florence Nightingale in the Crimea, and pioneer woman surgeon Dr. Mabel Ramsey worked on the battlefields in the first world war.

I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement to extend the scope for women to be involved in our armed forces, as will many of my female constituents who serve in them.

Equally, Plymouth has a unique record in the representation of women in Parliament. There are many pictures in the corridors of the House that feature Lady Astor and mark her role as the first woman to take her seat, in 1919, representing the constituency of Plymouth, Sutton. Her maiden speech was made in a debate on one of her favourite campaigning issues, which she referred to as the "vexed question of drink". I think that she would have approved of the steps announced before the recess to control the sale of alcopops. She stood up for equal rights for women in the civil service, and I suspect that she would have been the first to castigate the former Minister for the Armed Forces and the present shadow Secretary of State for their somewhat lukewarm remarks on my right hon. Friend's decisions about the scope for women in the armed forces.

Lady Astor wanted to raise the school leaving age to 16 to reduce unemployment, and she made clear her annoyance at the lack of interest shown in social reform. Indeed, she would feel at home with much of the programme set out by new Labour, as we move to raise standards in education and to recognise the essential links that this has with sustaining employment in today's world. I think that she would also have been angry to know, at the end of the 20th century, that the constituency—on the 1995 index of local conditions—includes St. Peter's as the poorest ward in England.

Lady Astor was the first of an almost unbroken succession of women politicians to represent the city of Plymouth, which must be unique to our city. In the Labour landslide election of 1945, Lucy Middleton was elected the first Labour woman to represent the seat. In the aftermath of war, international co-operation and the role of food aid in achieving this was the subject of her maiden speech.

In 1955, Dame Joan Vickers was elected to the neighbouring seat of Plymouth, Devonport, and was the first woman to represent a dockyard constituency. Dame Joan lost her seat in 1974, the same year that a former Deputy Speaker, Dame Janet Fookes, now Baroness Fookes, became the Member for Plymouth, Drake, which she represented until this year.

The new Plymouth, Sutton is the successor seat to Plymouth, Drake. Baroness Fookes campaigned successfully for an Act to stop kerb crawling in 1995, and concluded her long service in Parliament, in this House, as Deputy Speaker, commanding the respect of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

As the fifth woman representing the city, and following such a distinguished line of women Members, I am proud to be the city's first Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament. I shall be active in seeking co-operative solutions to the many challenges that we face locally and nationally, working alongside my 24 Labour and Co-operative colleagues on Government Benches.

I am also mindful that there is still much to be done to secure the proper representation of women in the House. There still have not been many more than 200 women Members since Lady Astor took her seat in 1919. In the same time, there have been more than 4,000 male Members of Parliament. I look forward to working with all hon. Members, particularly the 117 other women, to sustain the momentum that we achieved at the 1997 election.

Despite recent reductions, unemployment in the city of Plymouth continues to be alarmingly high. We have suffered from the decline of employment of our traditional industry in the dockyard. Indeed, it has been nearly decimated. The emphasis given by the Government on equipping people for work through their "new deal" programme is welcome, as are measures on education standards to help our citizens to compete in the global economy. Along with my colleagues on the city council, in the partnerships that they have forged with people in business and in the community, I shall work hard to ensure that we respond enthusiastically to those measures.

However, given that there are 11 people unemployed for every job vacancy in Plymouth in recent times, something must be done to ensure that the job market improves. There has been much anger about the destruction of key parts of our defence, particularly the naval industrial base. Skilled teams of workers have been cast wantonly to the inefficient vagaries of the unfettered free market. The country invested time, skill and money in training people who are now under-using their skills, or are not able to use them at all.

It is nearly 30 years since the United Nations identified more than 40 ways in which military engineering and technological skills could be used for civilian industrial research and development—particularly in one of the world's future growth industries, environmental technology. At long last we are taking that seriously.

We look forward to a major conference on defence diversification in Bristol next week. I also welcome the announcement that a Green Paper on our plans for defence diversification—as promised in our manifesto—will be published in the autumn. We must fight for opportunities

[Mrs. Linda Gilroy]

to maximise those valuable industrial skills and knowledge, and I hope that we will pay particular attention to the role that green technology can play in the process of diversification.

Although we need to diversify our economy, the defence industry will remain a central part of it. At last we have a strategic defence review based on the foreign policy needs of our country, and the outcome of that review must ensure that we have the right sea, air and land capabilities to defend our economic and trading interests, as well as capabilities that enable us to be an effective ally with our partners in the global arena. Our defence and peacekeeping capabilities require the utmost in skills and discipline: they are something in which our country can and should take great pride. The city of Plymouth certainly does, and our contribution is still significant, despite the cuts to which I referred earlier.

From the 29th Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery at the citadel to 3 Commando Brigade, Royal Marines in Stonehouse barracks; from the MOD workers who work in support of the Navy and the dockyard workers at Devonport royal dockyard; from British Aerospace workers to the men and women of the Territorial Army based at Millbay who serve under the 4th Battalion the Devonshire and Dorset Regiment—in the south-west region, of which we like to think of Plymouth as being the capital, some 16,000 men and women earn their living, and spend their working lives in the service of us all. They deserve a review that acknowledges the importance of the vital role that they play.

I stress the importance to Plymouth of the royal naval dockyard. Despite its virtual decimation, it is an industry in which the workers and the city still take great pride. Again and again, Devonport Management Ltd. and its workers have been able to report completion of work ahead of schedule. In recent months, the efficiency of the docking and essential defects programme on the type 23 frigate HMS Montrose resulted in its being undocked four days ahead of schedule.

The three-year programme of refit work on the nuclear submarine HMS Tireless is well ahead, and the team expects to flood her up four weeks early in 1998. The quality of the royal dockyard work is also high: the DML team responsible for the recent refit work on HMS Turbulent has been praised by both the MOD and the boat's commander for the quality of its work.

An adequate quantity of surface fleet work is of vital importance to maintaining the viability of the dockyard work force that will be responsible for the maintenance of the Trident fleet. The company and the work force hope that they will win the contract for type 23 frigate HMS Argyll, which is due for refit in May 1998. There are serious fears that failure to secure the bid may affect the permanent work force at Devonport dockyard. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will treat all bids fairly, and will consider value for money and the future strategic value of Devonport dockyard when examining bids.

The £339 million operation to create the world's best facilities to refit and refuel Britain's nuclear submarines is now well under way. It is an alliance of six international companies that are committed to building the engineering base for submarine work into the millennium and beyond—DML, Brown and Root, Rolls-Royce, Strachan and Henshaw, the Babtie Group and BNFL.

Each of the Vanguard fleet of four submarines—Victorious, Vigilance, Vengeance and Vanguard itself—has 44 miles of pipework and 300 miles of cabling. Each boat will need skilled refuelling and refitting, which will be Plymouth royal dockyard's critical future contribution to maintaining a British minimum deterrent into the next millennium. The skills required to do that work are of the highest order, and I know that they will not be found wanting among the work force of the royal dockyard.

Cradle of the Commonwealth, springboard for the new world, defender of the peace in the next millennium—the city of Plymouth has a proud heritage, and a challenging future. As I join my neighbouring colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), in representing the city of Plymouth, I look forward to rising to my part in meeting that challenge.

After many years, our party has been given the trust and responsibility of government. The people of Plymouth lent us their trust on 1 May 1997, and I aim to play my part in retaining that trust. I commend my constituency's honourable track record in the defence of the country throughout the past millennium, and I invite my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to take full account of it as he carries out his serious responsibilities in the conduct of our strategic defence review.

8.46 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy). I congratulate her on her maiden speech, and on her obvious commitment to her constituency and her work here. I thank her for her kind remarks about her predecessor, who, I think, was popular throughout the House.

It is, perhaps, sobering to think that, if it was in the hon. Lady's constituency that the fleet was launched to deal with the armada, it was just north of the coastline of my constituency that the Royal Navy was humiliated a century later, when one of the bravest fleets that we have ever sent went to fight the Dutch in rotting warships almost without ammunition. Reference has been made to an article opposing the Eurofighter; we should think about how nearly we experienced a repetition of that half a century ago, when, in the skies above Kent and Essex, our gallant pilots flew the Spitfires and Hurricanes that they had received, with barely days to spare in the case of some squadrons.

I share the concern that my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) expressed about the £170 million that has been removed from the defence budget. The Secretary of State has assured us that it is just an accounting change resulting from an overspend in the previous year, but, be that as it may, many Conservative Members will watch carefully what happens to the defence budget.

I want briefly to consider the nature of the threat that we may be facing, and then suggest a method by which we could secure substantially more value for money from our armed forces, splendid as they are. Arguably, the three most serious contests in which we have been involved since 1945 are the Korean war, the Falklands war and the Gulf war. They have a number of characteristics in common. First, they all blew up at extremely short notice, with no proper warning. Secondly, each of them breached the defence planning assumptions of the time. Thirdly, in the case of Korea, conscription was available and, indeed, in use; and, in the case of the two subsequent conflicts, we were able to cannibalise the substantial slack in the system that existed because of the commitment to cold war regular forces, which have been substantially reduced since. Finally, each of those wars involved substantial-scale deployment of forces in high-intensity conflict.

The feeling in Foreign Office circles, in academic circles and even in some defence circles seems to be that we will have considerable warning of the next conflict in which we get involved. It has even been suggested by some of the people whose names appear on the list of participants at the various seminars that the Ministry of Defence is holding that we shall have a choice as to whether we participate and on what scale.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) outlined some chilling scenarios. The idea that we would have a choice as to whether to participate if there were a substantial nuclear or high-intensity conventional threat either in the Gulf area, where most of the world's oil comes from, or in parts of the middle east and north Africa, which are much closer to western Europe, is completely wrong. We would have no choice: we would have to participate, because of our vital interests. We would need highly capable, large-scale and sustainable armed forces.

How can we square the circle? As hon. Members have acknowledged, our spending, like that of most of our allies, is much smaller than it used to be. How do we maintain a wide range of capabilities within a necessarily constrained defence budget, even if some of us would like it to be a little larger? Most other countries take one of two routes: either they have conscription, which France is now rightly moving away from, or, as in almost every other country in the developed world, they make much greater use of reserves. In the case of ground forces, reserves are typically one fifth of the cost of their regular counterparts.

Let me give the example of land forces. I am conscious of the fact that a distinguished ex-volunteer, the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), is sitting in front of me, and a former territorial officer, my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), and a serving territorial officer, my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), are sitting next to me. In America, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, the reserve army is roughly the same size as the regular army. Britain's reserve forces are less than half the size of their regular counterparts. The combined populations of Australia and New Zealand are barely a third of ours, but they can raise almost as many reserve infantry as we can.

I have a splendid Territorial Army infantry unit headquarters in my constituency: the 5th Battalion of the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment. It took a full-strength battalion to camp: in fact, it had more than one camp this year. It is unbelievable that anyone could even contemplate cutting our reserve forces, particularly our reserve infantry, even further.

We should also consider our air forces. Most of us want to be able to afford the expensive aeroplanes that we need. In America, a third of all strategic airlift capability—this subject has come up several times in the debate—two thirds of all tactical airlift capability and 100 per cent. of the strategic interceptor force are manned by volunteers. Britain is full of flying organisations, from the airlines at the top end of the spectrum to the organisations that service North sea oil rigs. We are just beginning to toy with the idea of having a few individual air volunteer reservists as flying crew on modern jets. The experience in America is that there is better value for money and lower wastage if people are in formed units rather than in pools. That applies even more strongly to the army. High-calibre people do not want to be part of a manpower pool: they do not want to be trained in individual skills, but they want to be part of a unit that trains as a unit or as part of a larger formation.

When we compare Britain, which tries to run a set-up that is four-fifths regular, with other English-speaking countries that make much greater use of reserves, we realise why we are so desperately short of money for equipment. There is something faintly funny about the fact that civilians who join volunteer forces as children of their own era and who are used to dealing with high technology are often presented with military technology that is a generation older than the technology with which they are familiar in civilian life. They are all too often told by patronising voices from the Ministry of Defence that the technology is too complicated for reservists to use.

The Americans sent 90,000 volunteer reservists to the Gulf. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) wants to enlighten us. He does not want to say anything. Fair enough.

The Americans sent 90,000 volunteer reservists to the Gulf. They included an artillery brigade, tank battalions from their marine reserves and air guard fighter squadrons. They are currently sending reserve units through Bosnia, including air guard and national guard units. Britain has sent many hundreds of volunteer reservists: at one point, they were 10 per cent. of the force. A regular commanding officer quoted by Field Marshal Lord Bramall said:

> "Thank goodness for the Territorial Army! . . . Without wishing to appear melodramatic, the . . . Territorial Army soldiers who arrived before Christmas saved the REME bacon. . . . To a man, they are enthusiastic"—

Perhaps he should have said "woman" as well, because there are a number of women in our force in Bosnia—

> "they are enthusiastic, cheerful and willing."

We hear from the press and through direct contacts that our volunteer reserves in active service frequently spend months either with the wrong pay or even no pay in one or two cases. There have been muddles over their documentation, there has been a failure to liaise properly with their employers, and they often have family problems that are much more easily solved in the regular forces where we have our married quarter patches. Mobilisation should be organised by reservists, because they are familiar with the problems of people who have a full-time civilian as well as a military job.

That brings me to a wider point. The successful and imaginative use of reserves—finding new jobs that reservists could do at less expense than their regular

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counterparts—requires a set-up that goes with the grain of the civilian world and brings in the volunteer spirit. It is like the difference between the BBC, a public service of which we are extremely proud, and my favourite commercial radio station, Classic FM. They have a different ethos: Classic FM would not be the organisation it is if all its senior producers were provided by the BBC.

Alone among English-speaking countries, Britain has insisted that every general since 1945 with reservist responsibilities should be a regular who is parachuted into the job. I shall quote from a debate that took place in the House 90 years ago. Sir Charles Dilke quoted a letter in *The Times* from a colleague who said:

> "The War Office has always hated the Volunteers and sneered at them and despised them. That prejudice is still as strong as ever".

Sir Charles went on:

> "The language used is, perhaps, too highly coloured, but the fact is that the Regular soldier has never understood the Volunteer, and it is accordingly urged that steps should be taken to prevent the Volunteer from being put under the Regular Army, bound hand and foot."

We have recently done that with the "one Army" concept.

> "I think the Volunteers ought to be represented on the Army Council itself."—[*Official Report*, 9 April 1907; Vol. 172, c. 115.]

Coincidentally, 90 years later Congress is debating a measure to put the head of the national guard on the chiefs of staff. The Senate has already passed the measure. I do not propose that we should put the head of the Territorial Army on to the chiefs of staff, but Australia, which has only 17 million people, has three part-time generals. It is ridiculous that Britain does not even have one. As an Australian paper recently stated, a country cannot expect to retain good-quality officers in the reserve forces if they have no opportunity to occupy senior positions. There has been a small step with the appointment next month of the first ever volunteer reservist as director of reservists. However, the appointment is at only one-star level.

America, Canada, New Zealand and Australia have reserve forces wastage rates of about 20 per cent. Our wastage rate is one half higher than that at about 30 per cent. Some of the initiatives in those countries go with the grain of civilian life. They have long officer courses that are tailored to university vacations. In Canada and Australia, reports are prepared for employers on the value of volunteer service to individual soldiers. Family support operations have been established in the national guard in many southern states, run by volunteers and not state funded.

Britain can do great things with its reserve forces. In the second world war, two of the three battalions that held Calais when the British Army was in terrible straits at Dunkirk were TA battalions. In a recent Swiss commando raid competition the 10 Para teams finished top worldwide of all the non-Swiss reserve teams, beating three of the four regular teams. We can do it and elements of the TA are showing what can be done now. If in an uncertain world with an uncertain threat Ministers wish to make our limited defence resources go further, they must begin to take advice from senior reservists rather than just from people inside the white building about imaginative ways in which volunteer reserve units can be given a greater role in all three services.

9 pm

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): I am grateful for this opportunity to take part in the debate and to make my maiden speech.

The armed services and the defence industry have long associations with my constituents, particularly those in the Medway towns and in the Royal British Legion village in Aylesford. The new seat of Chatham and Aylesford is drawn from the old Mid-Kent and Tonbridge and Malling constituencies. It encapsulates much of the rich variety that characterises Kent. The seat contains both urban and rural areas and important industries that have grown up around the River Medway.

My two predecessors are highly regarded hon. Members, and both have deserved reputations as hard-working constituency Members. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) is a distinguished former Minister of State for the Armed Forces. He and I joined forces in a battle to seek noise mitigation measures for our constituents who live alongside the M20. The hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) is my former Member of Parliament. He is independently minded, and we share an interest in the welfare of young people and in opportunities for them, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. An example of the hon. Gentleman's interest in young people became apparent to me recently, because when I was going through some old papers I discovered a letter from him wishing me a happy 18th birthday. Furthermore, in the letter he invited me to meet him at the Conservative club in Medway for coffee. The meeting was to be held in the Thatcher room. I politely declined his offer.

The royal dockyard in Chatham has long been at the heart of the Medway towns. Its closure in 1984 is well recorded and it is a credit to the local people that despite the inevitable pain that the closure caused, the dockyard has not died, but has been transformed. Part of it is now a thriving business community with new housing and leisure facilities, and the oldest part is an 80-acre historic dockyard. It is a popular, award-winning tourist attraction drawing more than 100,000 visitors a year. We were delighted to be visited recently by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. During his visit, he announced a much needed £16 million cash injection from the national lottery and other sources.

Much of the excellent work that has led to the rebirth of the historic dockyard is attributable to the hard work of Admiral of the Fleet, Sir William Staveley, the chairman of the historic dockyard. Tragically, he died just a couple of weeks ago. Sir William was the flag officer at Medway from 1959 to 1961, and had a distinguished military career, which culminated in 1985 in his appointment as First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff. I had the pleasure and honour to spend a morning and have lunch with him shortly after the visit by my right hon. Friend. His enthusiasm, energy and commitment were always evident.

We have lost a great champion, a man of great stature and vision, but it is perhaps some comfort to know that he secured for the historic dockyard the future for which he had fought so hard before his sudden and untimely death. He was a man of great stature, and I am sure that the House would wish to join me in expressing heartfelt condolences to his widow, Lady Staveley, and their children.

Within this debate, we rightly acknowledge and pay tribute to the women and men of our armed services. Having a brother who served in the Blues and Royals Regiment for 18 years, I know the commitment and professionalism that they bring to their jobs, but it is also right to acknowledge the efforts of civilian staff who support our soldiers, sailors, marines and pilots. I wish to use the opportunity of my maiden speech to draw attention to the Chatham dockyard workers who worked on nuclear submarines between 1966 and 1983.

Thousands of jobs were secured in 1965, when the Government announced that Chatham dockyard would become a nuclear refit centre. In 1966, the *Chatham Observer*, the local paper, quoted dockyard managers as saying that two watchwords would govern the way in which the dockyard was run: safety and absolute care. They said that workers who came into contact with radiation would be checked and rechecked. As is usual practice, the MOD put in place a series of controls and checks to monitor radiation dose exposure and to ensure that exposure of the civilian work force was as low as reasonably practical.

The civilian work force at Chatham dockyard were all fit young men. Indeed, they had to have medicals to prove the case before they were given the go-ahead to work on the nuclear submarines. They were the cream of Medway, as the current mayor of Rochester described them. As the widow of one of the former workers and as an experienced nurse, she is well placed to make such an assessment.

It is estimated that between 2,000 and 3,000 men worked on the submarines between 1966 and 1983. In 1990, some six years after the dockyard was closed, there was growing concern in the Medway towns about the number of former dockyard workers who had contracted one type of cancer or another. Those men were frequently in their 30s and 40s and many had young families.

A campaign then ensued, primarily to persuade the MOD to carry out its duty of care and to provide annual medical checks to any former dockyard worker, as take place for other workers in the nuclear industry. At the head of the campaign was a former dockyard worker, Tim Robson, the late husband of Rochester's mayor, Linda Robson, to whom I referred. Having served his apprenticeship in the dockyard as a boilermaker in the 1970s, he, like many young men, took advantage of the extra pay on offer in the dockyard to work on the nuclear submarines. In the dockyard, two different types of workers were permitted to work on the submarines: classified workers, the mainstay of the operation, and the approved or written scheme workers, who were drafted in for extra help.

A year after he started the campaign to help his fellow dockyard workers, Tim Robson and his family were given the news that he too had cancer—Hodgkin's disease. Despite his illness, he continued his campaign and was overwhelmed with the number of inquiries from ex-workers and their families who were concerned about their health and reporting instances where safety and absolute care were far from being the watchwords.

During its time as a nuclear facility, Chatham was often under pressure. The work on the submarines, to refuel or to decommission them, was frequently behind schedule. What emerged from the campaign was a concern that, because of the pressure, proper monitoring and safety were not always in place. That is well illustrated in the case of David Spriggs, a refitter on a Dreadnought. He was working deep in the heart of a reactor when a pipe burst above his head and drenched him in water. The supervisor reportedly told him to carry on until the end of the shift, when the Geiger counter showed alarming levels of radiation exposure.

Following the accident, which the MOD called a serious incident, David Spriggs was told to take six months off, yet he was back at work within a couple of weeks because of pressure of work at the dockyard. When operations started, guarantees were given that any worker who had contact with radiation would be checked and checked again. As I said earlier, the watchwords were safety and absolute care. In 1995, David Spriggs died of cancer aged 38. His widow requested his dosage records, which should have been kept if he had had a high level of exposure—even though he was only an approved or written scheme worker—so that she might seek compensation under the scheme for radiation-linked diseases. The MOD informed her that no records could be found. Accordingly, David Spriggs must never have been in that reactor.

Despite a two-year battle to retrieve those records, David Spriggs's widow has yet to make any progress and she is now taking the MOD to court. The witnesses asked to appear are likely to come forward to say that they saw David and can testify that he frequently worked in the reactor compartment in nuclear submarines at Chatham dockyard.

A further concern to us in the Medway towns is that the MOD may not have done all that it could to ensure that all available safety systems were in place at Chatham. It failed to install the new safety system, Modex, an American invention, which was introduced in American yards in the 1960s and early 1970s. It was a significant development in dose abatement technology. According to the Defence Committee report of 1990, it reduces the dose burden within the reactor compartment by a factor of four to eight. As has been said, Modex was introduced at Devonport and Rosyth in about 1979, but it was never installed at Chatham.

Tim Robson, by then a leading local councillor, continued the campaign and won the support of Rochester city council in January 1994. The council used its resources to press the MOD to provide annual health checks for former dockyard workers, so that it would be possible for them to detect at the earliest possible stages whether they had a cancer that could be attributed to radiation exposure.

After years of campaigning, a significant step was taken in June this year, when my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence launched a local counselling scheme in partnership with Rochester city council. Under that scheme, expert doctors provide advice locally to former workers and their families. Since the scheme was launched, 210 inquiries have been made nationally for dosage records from the MOD, and 94 per cent. of them have come from people who worked at Chatham. That demonstrates the success and importance of a local scheme rather than having to rely on a national one.

On the same day, my hon. Friend announced that the MOD would invest £1 million on improving access to radiation dose records not currently held on computer.

[Mr. Jonathan Shaw]

We very much hope that that will speed up the system. We in Medway welcome the Government's positive response to the city council's campaign. It has not been easy to take those two important steps, and I pay tribute to the officers of Rochester city council who have made so much extra effort and dedicated so much time to the campaign. Particular praise must be afforded to Mr. Dennis Holmes, the senior lead officer, without whose endeavours we might not have made the progress that we have.

We need more information to obtain a clearer picture of the safety standards applied, to discover whether they were as stringent as they should have been at Chatham dockyard. We in Medway believe that too many young men who worked on the nuclear submarines have died from cancer. They were not average men, but fit young men, the cream of Medway, as I described them earlier. The campaign is by no means over and there are other issues that must be dealt with in the future, such as the accident records. Will they be made available to assist people to make compensation claims? As for the compensation scheme, is it right that a no fault principle should stand if there is clear evidence of error or neglect?

What happens to the information collated from the counselling scheme? How many other people will discover, as did David Spriggs's widow, that records have not been kept? As for medical screening, we believe that annual medical checks are essential. We should also like research to be undertaken into the types of cancers arising from exposure to radiation.

Earlier, I described my constituency of Chatham and Aylesford and, as is the custom during a maiden speech, I paid tribute to the right hon. and hon. Gentlemen whom I have succeeded. Technically, however, as I represent a new seat, I have no direct predecessor. There was, however, a previous Labour candidate, my friend and colleague, the ex-dockyard worker, Tim Robson. He was selected at a time when we hoped that his health was improving, such was his determination to enter this House to represent the people of Chatham and Aylesford, in particular Chatham, a place where he had lived all his life and of which he was genuinely proud. Tim died in August 1995 at the age of 39, leaving his wife, now our much respected mayor, and two teenage daughters.

Hon. Members arrive at the House through a variety of circumstances, and as I enjoy the immense honour of representing the people of Chatham and Aylesford, I cannot help recalling that I am here partly through the tragic loss of someone who had a considerable influence on my life and whom I am proud to have known so well. I hope that this maiden speech will be a fitting tribute to Tim Robson's memory and the campaign that he started. He started that campaign, but it is by no means concluded.

9.14 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): It is always a pleasure to follow a maiden speech, but it is especially so now because the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw) has made his mark in a way that will be remembered here and will read well in Chatham, a town that I know quite well, as my father once commanded the dockyard there and I started my career as a retailer in Chatham high street. The town will respect him as its representative here, and I am pleased that he chose this debate in which to make his maiden speech.

I congratulate my successor as Chairman of the Defence Committee, the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), on his contribution to the debate. Our Committee has a reputation for always reaching unanimous decisions—we have never had to vote on anything—and that was the case in electing him to the chairmanship. I am very pleased that he is in that position; it is a proof that patience is a virtue, but I dare say that, in politics, honesty is not, because if anyone should be sitting on the Front Bench, it is he. I dare say that the Treasury would be less sanguine about some of his comments as a defence spokesman than about those that the Secretary of State is likely to make. My remarks may have finished the hon. Member for Walsall, South for good and all, but there we are.

The hon. Gentleman drew attention to the amount of blue paper lying on the Table, and it is true that the Committee had a pretty prolific turnout of reports, all of which were constructively critical, which should serve as an example for the work that we shall do in the future. The previous Government listened carefully to what we had to say and, I am glad to say, acted on our advice on many occasions.

The present Government have not reacted as constructively as they might to the report on defence medical services, in which we made it clear that, while we reluctantly recognised the need to reduce the manpower in our armed services by about 30 per cent. since 1989, the defence medical services have been reduced by 40 per cent.

Those services were studied in "Front Line First" rather than in "Options for Change", because they were regarded by the MOD as a support service, which they are not. Their duty is to put field hospitals on the ground, and it became clear in our inquiry that they would be unable to supply the number of hospitals that would be required if our troops were to perform their roles effectively.

In their response, the Government did not grasp the need for better use of reservists, and especially territorials, who have medical and technical expertise because of their work in hospitals, in manning our medical services in the field. Perhaps the Minister could say a little more about that.

Our defence industrial base was considered by the Select Committees on Defence and on Trade and Industry about three years ago. We produced a report on aspects of defence procurement. Since then, little has happened with regard to restructuring the European defence industries. In the meantime, the United States of America has tackled the problem of having 15 prime contractors. That number has been whittled down to only three: Boeing Douglas, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon Hughes. Each of those prime contractors is bigger than all the European defence industries put together. If ever there was a need for Europe to get its act together and start restructuring its industry, it is now.

The Western European Union is beginning to address the problem of reorganising the European defence industrial base. It is useful for the WEU to fulfil that role rather than trying to imitate NATO. The problem is that in Britain, we have addressed the problems of denationalising our industries while the Europeans have not. Until France and Germany tackle privatisation, the cross-frontier mergers that ought to take place will not happen. We shall be at a competitive disadvantage to the

Americans. That said, I remind the House of the importance of the two-way street of defence-related trade between Britain and the United States. We do the lion's share of defence trade with the United States. I am glad to say that the two-way street is now only 2:1 in favour of the United States; it was about 10:1 before the Conservative Government came to power. The ratio has improved, but it could be improved further. Even if we restructure the European defence industrial base, we must not lock ourselves into a fortress Europe.

Lastly, I want pick up on the Defence Committee report on defence spending, which was the last one that we did. I remind the Government of the concluding sentence of our final recommendations. The Minister probably knows it by heart, but it is worth putting on record. The Committee said:

> "We insist that the defence spending plans set out in the 1996 budget must at least be maintained in real terms in future years. Any further reduction would jeopardise the defence of the realm."

That is the view of this House.

9.21 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I congratulate the two hon. Members who have made maiden speeches. My constituency has a naturally close affinity with those of my hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy) and for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw); it manufactured the Trident submarines on which the economic prosperity of the Plymouth, Sutton constituency largely depends and the nuclear submarines mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford. We have a special affinity to him and the difficulties that his constituents are experiencing.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his excellent speech and particularly on the emphasis that he placed on strong defence forces in future. The Government have made an auspicious start, with action on land mines, the recruitment of more women and ethnic minorities to the armed forces, a new deal for Gulf war veterans and the launch of a long overdue strategic defence review.

I am particularly encouraged by my right hon. Friend's reference to the expected Green Paper on defence diversification. We must find ways to end the haemorrhaging of vital industrial skills caused by previous defence spending reductions. That will be no easy task because there are no simple solutions. The Government cannot create the new jobs—only companies can—but they can help with support and advice. We need to learn the lessons of the experiences of other countries such as Germany and the United States. The Government have a special moral responsibility to help with the process because they are often the only customer of defence contractors. If an agency is to be established, I would like it to be set up in Barrow—the most defence-dependent constituency in the United Kingdom. I look forward to reading the details of the Green Paper in the near future.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the international security and defence environment has changed radically and fundamentally since the end of the cold war. The threat of all-out nuclear confrontation has receded; in its place has come uncertainty about the possible nature and location of future armed conflicts.

One thing is clear: the end of the cold war has not brought about an end to armed conflict. It could be argued that the exact opposite has happened. We cannot afford to be naive about the new post cold war environment; the world remains a dangerous place. It is also clear after the tragedy in Bosnia that individual states and the international community, acting through the United Nations, may well be called upon to intervene in future conflicts on humanitarian grounds and to attempt to restore peace and stability. That will have important consequences and implications for us as we prepare the new ground rules for British defence policy into the next century and it is why the strategic defence review is so necessary and timely.

I hope that the review will lay the foundations for a new national consensus about defence and security policy built on our firm support for the United Nations and the principle of collective security, acting through both NATO and the general mandate of the Security Council. The Government are entirely right to make Trident the cornerstone of that new security architecture.

I agree with what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said on 3 July at one of the two strategic defence review seminars. He said:

> "you cannot have an ethical foreign policy if it is an isolationist foreign policy. That is partly why, in rejecting isolationism, we commit Britain to building a strong international community. If we take the view that the principles of the UN Charter are a matter of common concern, we cannot stand back when those principles are being violated."

The obvious conclusion, and one that I know from his comments my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State shares, is that Britain needs strong, highly mobile and flexible armed forces, clearly focused on meeting the new security challenges that lie ahead and equipped with the best in modern armaments.

An ethical and internationalist foreign, and therefore defence, policy must mean that, after the defence of the United Kingdom and our NATO allies is taken into account, an increasing priority will have to be placed on Britain's capacity to take part in allied expeditionary operations in trouble spots that potentially threaten either international or regional peace and security. This will have important implications for our defence procurement programme, about which I want to say a few words later, but first I wish to make one thing clear.

I am not arguing for a return to gunboat diplomacy, nor do I have a yearning for any sense of imperial grandeur—far from it. We cannot act as the world's policeman and we should not try to do so. I am talking of Britain, with the international community, assuming a responsibility to promote peace, to uphold international law and human rights and to maintain international stability. We have a unique opportunity to contribute to that process because of the excellence and experience of our armed forces. By an expeditionary capability I simply mean the ability to move forces promptly and safely from the United Kingdom to a distant operational theatre, via a secured route, with effective support and with the ability to perform a safe withdrawal.

Mr. Gray: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hutton: No; I do not have not much time.

The Royal Navy will have a central role in ensuring that British forces can be deployed safely around the world. It is vital to retain and develop the Navy's amphibious capability. The new assault landing ships HMS Bulwark

[Mr. Hutton]

and HMS Albion, the new helicopter carrier HMS Ocean and the nuclear submarines, which we can deploy over a long range and which provide effective anti-submarine warfare capability, will be crucial in this project. All those vessels are being built in my constituency.

In short, as Sir Benjamin Bathurst wrote in 1995, the aim of maritime power is

> "to place world wide operational options in the hand of the government".

Those options can then be used in support of international security, peacekeeping, combating international crime and supporting humanitarian operations.

If we are to retain an effective amphibious capability, we will need to develop a replacement programme for the Invincible class aircraft carriers. Invincible was built in my constituency and launched 20 years ago; Illustrious and Ark Royal are respectively 18 months and four years her junior. Key decisions will have to be taken some time during this Parliament if we are to bring any new vessels into operation by around 2012. Carriers are flexible platforms that can provide a mix of aircraft for specific tasks, including air cover for amphibious landings. We will not always be able to rely on mounting these operations from land bases and HMS Ocean will not be able to perform those vital tasks on her own—nor was she designed to do so.

Some difficult decisions will have to be made about the future carrier replacement programme. Above all, there is the question of affordability: significant capital outlay will be required both for the vessels—perhaps two or three of them—and for the aircraft. Carriers are expensive, but their military potential has never been in doubt. The choice we have to make will be strategic, not operational. I therefore hope that the issue will be addressed in the strategic defence review and that the review will make out the case in favour of the new carriers. At the very least, I hope that the options will be kept open so that design and planning work can continue.

In the brief time available to me, I want to make one or two remarks about the Government's procurement policy. Previous Governments have been rightly criticised for delays in key procurement decisions and for lack of effective consultation with the defence industry, which have led to confusion and unnecessary job losses. It is important that the new Government should avoid making those mistakes. I welcome the Government's smart procurement initiative, which is designed to eliminate cost overruns and delays in equipment programmes. We need to develop a closer dialogue with the defence industry and regularly to discuss future procurement requirements on a long-term basis. I want the Government to identify strategic partners in key areas of weapons and platform procurement and to work with those commercial partners to develop and deliver the equipment our forces want to an agreed timetable and price. There are huge benefits in such an approach, including continuity, expertise and stability.

In some areas, it is unrealistic to expect competition between rival companies to be the best guarantor of value for money. The defence industry reconstruction in the 1980s and 1990s has resulted in the emergence of many single-source suppliers and that is especially true in the case of large ship construction—Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. in my constituency is the only shipbuilder left in the UK capable of building the Navy's larger vessels. We should avoid artificial competition exercises. We should be prepared to use the NAPNOC—no acceptable price, no contract—procedures more frequently, because they can deliver good equipment at affordable prices, as was demonstrated by the landing platform dock replacement programme.

In 1946, Adlai Stevenson said that

> "making peace is harder than making war"

and he was probably right, but it is because of the contribution we can make to improving the international security environment that Britain cannot afford to be a spectator in world events. We can be a positive force for peace, human rights and democracy, but none of those things comes cheaply. If we are to play that positive role, we will need highly professional, well-equipped and well-resourced armed forces. That is a simple fact of life. I have absolute confidence in the Government's stance on these matters and that in the years ahead Britain will continue to play an active part in maintaining international peace and security.

9.32 pm

Sir David Madel (South-West Bedfordshire): First, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy) on her excellent maiden speech. We especially noted her warm tributes to all her women predecessors in that constituency. The hon. Lady rightly also paid tribute to Plymouth's contribution to industry and to the defence of this country. We look forward to hearing her many times in the future.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw). I noted his remarks about restoring industry because there was no more work in the dockyard—a casualty of defence policy. We in Bedfordshire have the same industrial difficulties because an order for civilian lorries for Libya was vetoed by the Foreign Office. I therefore felt an immediate accord with the hon. Gentleman when he referred to the problems in his constituency. Hon. Members also paid special attention to his remarks about safety at work and we look forward to hearing from him again in future, especially on that topic.

The Government have announced that they are considering a suitable memorial for the many people who have lost their lives as a result of the tragedy in Northern Ireland. That is perfectly relevant and I am grateful to the Government for saying that they welcome all views as to the nature of the memorial, but as remembrance Sunday draws near, we are also approaching the 50th anniversary of action taken by our service men and our allies to stop the cold war becoming a full-scale hot war.

Next June will be the 50th anniversary of the start of the Berlin airlift. That was one of the greatest humanitarian relief efforts ever undertaken, in support of 2.1 million people whom the late unlamented Joseph Stalin was trying to starve to death. Of course there was a price for that action. Thirty-nine British aircrew, 31 Americans and eight Germans were killed during the airlift, which lasted from June 1948 to October 1949. Their names are inscribed on the memorial at Tempelhof airfield in Berlin but, according to the imperial war museum, there is no memorial in the United Kingdom to the British service men killed in the Berlin airlift. As we are approaching the

50th anniversary of what happened there. I hope that the Government will give thought and consideration to what should be done.

A mere two years later, in 2000, we shall remember the stand that we took in Korea and the number of British service men who lost their lives there—again stopping the cold war blazing into a full-scale hot war.

I shall say a word about the latest position on pay for the armed services. The Government will know that, in February 1997, we were introducing a new service personnel strategy, one of the main elements of which was a movement towards a system of pay bands. We were going to bring the armed forces' pay into line with pay practices in the civil service. We obviously want to know, as the Opposition, whether the Government are continuing with that.

I am aware that the Government have undertaken to implement in full the second stage of the 1997 pay award on 1 December. We all know that the Chancellor has made some austere statements about public pay, but I want an assurance that the Government will continue the work on the implementation of the new personnel strategy and that personnel and pay policies are not an object of fresh study in the strategic defence review.

I understand that some Territorial Army service men, especially those who have served in Bosnia, are receiving their pay three months late. We all know, do we not, the grim reminder on an income tax return that late payment of income tax can attract interest. If the Government cannot get that matter sorted out quickly, they might like to find out whether there may be a temporary adjustment of tax codes for these people, who have served in Bosnia and elsewhere, who would have been paid three months ago, but who have not been because of administrative difficulties. I should like the Government to say something about that, either today, when the Minister replies, or in the debate tomorrow.

It has emerged clearly from the debate that there must be no suggestion of cutting Territorial Army training. TA training levels must recognise the practical need to maintain continuity, credibility and interest against the many other distractions that motivated young people might take up at weekends or at other times. The Government will be aware, as we are, that the TA state of readiness has been reduced from R5 to R8. Now that that has happened, I hope that the Government can assure us that they will not cut training or turn away potential recruits to the TA.

Certain provisions of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 must be implemented this year or early next year. What is the position concerning the compensation that employers receive when employees go on TA duties? As I understand it, negotiations are in mid-stream. It would help our debate if the Government would bring us up to date on the progress of those negotiations.

I should like to say a word about the anti-personnel mines campaign, to which several right hon. Members, including the Secretary of State, referred today. The latter mentioned the Oslo agreement which is to be signed. One such weapon is the delayed action mine, which was dropped in the Gulf war after raids on concrete runways to stop people rushing out to repair the runways afterwards. We all hope that there will never again be a middle east war, but this anti-personnel mine is a purely defensive weapon designed to stop the aggressor rapidly repairing his airfields, from which his aircraft have taken off in aggressive action. We should like to know whether this particular kind of mine, used exclusively on concrete runways, will be covered by the Oslo agreement.

We are all aware of the high costs of certain operational capabilities, such as surveillance, intelligence and target acquisition. At the strategic nuclear level, there is also a long-term need to maintain a strategic balance in Europe—particularly with Russia, where the prospects for further nuclear reductions remain uncertain. The Secretary of State said today that he was looking to the Foreign Office to stake out some general principles that defence policy would follow. I refer to two comments made by the Foreign Secretary in May of this year at the Western European Union ministerial meeting in Paris:

> "We think it is right and important to develop the European role in the defence area and for Europeans to take on an increased share of responsibility . . . We want to encourage the United States to remain fully engaged in Europe. And none of us can afford the wasteful duplication which would be the alternative to building on what we have created and tested in NATO."

I want to compare those remarks with our "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991", which remains as relevant today as it was in 1991. The Conservative Government said:

> "The requirement remains for armed forces that are properly manned, supported and well equipped. They should be able to engage in high-intensity conflict; to contribute to multinational formations; to deploy flexibly and rapidly in response to a spectrum of possible risks away from Europe; and they should retain the organisation, skills and military technology to permit a rebuilding of larger military capabilities to meet an increased threat should the need arise."

That statement certainly covered our action in the Gulf. It also made it clear that we would be able to engage in a high-intensity conflict in Bosnia, if necessary, once the United States brought in heavy weapons.

Our view is that if Britain drifts away from that 1991 statement, she will become an unreliable ally; and if that happens the American policy of support and commitment to European security will weaken. There is neither the political nor the economic will in Europe to replace what the United States does for us; and there is no sign that the European countries are anywhere near replacing that American commitment and all that it means.

I thought that the Secretary of State for Defence today sounded more confident and cheerful than he really felt. I believe he is in for an uncomfortable time as these reviews grind on and the Treasury makes itself felt in all the discussions on them. The Secretary of State will also find that Ministers who might have been friendly in the summer are not so friendly now. They are going to behave like a gang of bad Samaritans, passing by on the other side while the Secretary of State looks for help in getting enough money for the defence budget. He need not worry, however: help is to be found on our side of the House. The Opposition will always support a Labour Government if, on matters of defence, they act in the national interest and in concert with our allies to maintain the security of these islands.

9.44 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Dr. John Reid): I hope that I do not stun the House with my first comment. I thank and pay tribute to someone who is not here tonight. I did not always agree with Michael Portillo.

[Dr. John Reid]

Like all of us, he made mistakes and I lost no sleep when he lost his seat—I was in bed and slept soundly. The whole House, however, will wish to recognise the fact that he was committed to his country and made a determined contribution to its defence. It is therefore right to place on record our appreciation for everything that he did while in this House.

I hope that hon. Members will forgive me if I cannot respond in the time available to all the points made tonight. I shall try to return to some of the themes tomorrow. I thank the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Sir D. Madel), who summed up the debate for the Opposition. I shall deal with personnel and pay matters more generally tomorrow. I inquired about the reserves issue at the beginning of this month and was assured that any individual cases that have been brought to light have been dealt with. The primary reason for the backlog was the transfer of pay and personnel issues to a new centre in Glasgow. I blame that on no one, although it did occur before we came to power. We are doing all that we can to deal with it. The hon. Gentleman mentioned a monument or memorial. He will be aware that, while I support and encourage that idea, it is the long-standing policy of Governments that money and financial backing for such issues are raised by public subscription rather than Government donation.

Debates of this nature usually produce their range of stars and stalwarts. Tonight, we had one or two stars and I congratulate on behalf of the House my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy), who made her maiden speech. She spoke with great vigour and obvious commitment about both her present constituents and the history of Plymouth, Sutton. I was particularly interested in her reference to 1838 and the Tolpuddle martyrs. It reminded me that some years previously, a huge Reform Act was condemned by some Tories as a dangerous act of social and political engineering. Some of tonight's responses to the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about opportunities for women suggested that that was a dangerous act of social engineering, which shows that, at least in some quarters of the Tory party, nothing changes although the years may pass.

I also congratulate another star, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw), who made a deeply moving speech regarding workers in his constituency. His deep conviction was felt throughout the House. I thank him for his kind words about the initiatives taken by the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar). I am sure that he will serve his constituents as well as his predecessors did, and that we shall hear much more from him on this and other subjects.

I shall pass quickly from the stars to the shadow Secretary of State for Defence. I welcome him—an old friend of mine outside this Chamber—to the Dispatch Box this evening. He raised a number of points to which I shall try quickly to respond. The first was the course of NATO enlargement. As he will know, a wide range of figures have been given but they do not all appear to be based on a premise that the Government would accept.

The right hon. Gentleman ought to remember first, that even if no new members were joining, NATO would be going through a process of modernisation; secondly, that rationalisation of the old Warsaw pact structures in some of those countries will require a rundown—for instance, in the number of headquarters—and thirdly, that collective security generally is much cheaper than individual security. Those points should inform our judgment of the extra costs. We are convinced that the costs are manageable, but we shall reserve our comments until we have an informed judgment from NATO when it puts the figures to the Ministers' meeting next month.

As regards the defence budget, the right hon. Gentleman got into a lather about the fine. I shall make a couple of points about that. First, the Government are committed to living within the spending limits agreed by the previous Administration for this year and next. As regards the fine, the defence budget outturn in 1996–97 was £22,046 million—an overspend by the previous Government due to their incompetence, not ours, of £246 million against the cash limit.

It takes a bit of gall for the Government of the day, who overspent by £246 million, to condemn the present Secretary of State first, for spending the money, which he did not, and secondly, for having to pay a £168 million fine.

Sir George Young: Did the hon. Gentleman and the Secretary of State resist the approach from the Treasury?

Dr. Reid: If the right hon. Gentleman cannot work that out, I shall try to explain, within the limitations placed upon me with regard to divulging discussions. The overspend by his Government was £246 million. After negotiation over a period of time, the Secretary of State did not pay back £246 million; he paid back £168 million. If the right hon. Gentleman wishes, I shall give him further advice. One takes £246 million. One throws £168 million in the basket. Whatever is left represents what was achieved during the negotiations. It is entirely the fault and the incompetence of the previous Government—

Mr. Blunt *rose*—

Dr. Reid: I can do only one simple arithmetic lesson a night. I shall return to the hon. Gentleman tomorrow.

The shadow Secretary of State made an interesting point. Having mustered the combined strength of the Opposition and having decided that it was not sufficient to launch an attack on the Government, he pulled in that well-known pro-defence newspaper which the Tories have supported for many years—*The Guardian*. Joining forces with *The Guardian*, the right hon. Gentleman complained bitterly that, in the strategic defence review, "equipment had been protected"—that was the quotation.

Only two pieces of equipment have been protected. One is Trident, which I presume the shadow Secretary of State supports, and the other is the Eurofighter. We heard tonight for the first time a shadow Secretary of State abandoning the commitment of the whole House to support the Eurofighter. That will have been noted by thousands of workers throughout the country.

The hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) made a substantial contribution, as he always does on these occasions. I suspected that his combining the Foreign Office and Defence portfolios may have been informed by a search for someone who held both portfolios to lead the nation, but I know that he would not have such personal interest at heart. He raised a number of important issues, including Trident.

Let me make our position plain. The retention of Trident is one of the principles on which the strategic defence review is founded. Within that framework, the review will examine all aspects of our deterrence requirements, including nuclear warhead numbers. We have made it clear that we shall deploy only the minimum number of warheads required for credible deterrence in current circumstances on Trident submarines. If the circumstances allow reductions in the size of our capabilities, we shall be prepared to make those reductions while ensuring that we retain an effective deterrent.

Mr. Menzies Campbell *rose—*

Dr. Reid: I am sorry, but I have only six minutes in which to respond to all the issues raised during the debate. If I catch Madam Speaker's eye tomorrow, I shall give way to the hon. and learned Gentleman, who may return to the matter then.

I shall deal now with the contribution of that stalwart defender of strong defence for many years, my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). I congratulate him on his position as Chairman of the Defence Select Committee. I know that, irrespective of his party affiliations, he will pursue robustly the interests of the defence of this country. I know that other hon. Members will want to pay tribute to him also.

My hon. Friend raised several issues, including the joint staff college. Ministers have made their position on that issue quite clear: we do not start from where we would like to be; we start from where we are. Negotiations with defence management about a Shrivenham-based proposal for permanent facilities to be delivered via a private finance initiative are proceeding. It would clearly be inappropriate to comment further while negotiations are on-going. However, I place on record the fact that we are committed conceptually to reaping the immense benefits of working jointly. A joint staff college contributes to that.

Several hon. Members—the hon. Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin), my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South and the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth)—raised the question of the defence medical services. Only a fool would fail to acknowledge the parlous state of our defence medical services. There is a huge inadequacy, and it is one of the legacies with which the Government must deal. All hon. Members would agree that consensus on a framework should not stop our identifying the problems that exist within that framework. That charge is particularly true of the defence medical services. I shall refer to that matter tomorrow, but I make it plain that I did not wait the five years that I was allowed by the Defence Select Committee. Although it is only 15 months since reforms were introduced by the previous Government, I have ordered an urgent re-examination and requested that proposals for early action be sent to me about the matter.

The hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames)—the ex-Armed Forces Minister who is not present for the winding-up speeches, for understandable reasons—asked about combat effectiveness and the extension of opportunities for women in the armed forces. That matter was discussed with the Chief of the General Staff and other chiefs of staff. Combat effectiveness—which, as hon. Members will know, is defined as a unit or formation's ability to carry out a mission successfully in combat situations—is considered fully whenever we look at any of these matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) raised the matter of strategic and heavy lift. Although I obviously do not want to prejudice the conclusions of the strategic defence review, I give away no secrets when I say that that is one of the issues that has informed our discussions in the past three months.

I always listen to the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) with respect. He has served his country, and therefore deserves our attention when he speaks. He raised several procurement issues, and I hope that he will not mind if I leave those matters to the Under-Secretary of State to address when he has considered the record.

A defence debate would not be complete without the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay). I remember past debates when he and I were the only Members in the Chamber. He spoke with great gusto tonight. As I expected, he raised a matter to which he has referred before: reviewing the cases of British soldiers who were executed following courts martial during world war one. He will appreciate that the Government fully understand the widespread concern and the feelings aroused by that issue. I undertook to examine the matter, but I said at the time that I wanted neither to raise expectations nor, by addressing one perceived injustice, to appear to bring other injustices to the surface. It is an extremely difficult and sensitive issue which, given the long passage of time and the extent of the records, is taking time to assess in detail—but it has not been forgotten.

The hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) raised an issue that he has raised previously in these debates. He is a stalwart advocate of the cause of the Territorial Army. That will be examined in the review—as will every other issue—with rigorous scrutiny. That is what the country and the House expect. There have been suggestions that the Territorial Army will be turned into a leisure brigade. I, like the hon. Gentleman, read the newspapers. I can say only that I am in the business of providing capable and relevant professional and volunteer forces and I am not interested in creating a leisure brigade—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.

Kent and Sussex Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

10 pm

Mr. Archie Norman (Tunbridge Wells): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the question of the West Kent and East Sussex NHS trust private finance initiative. I am also grateful for the attention of the Minister on this serious matter.

My purpose in calling for this Adjournment debate is to raise the extremely serious position of the future capital funding of the trust. The hospital, which is spread between two sites in my Tunbridge Wells constituency—one in Pembury and one in the centre of Tunbridge Wells—serves the surrounding area of Tonbridge, Sevenoaks, East Sussex and Kent, down to the south coast. Until the PFI review in June, the trust was working with its partners on a substantial proposal for rebuilding the hospital on a single site.

I want to be clear that my purpose tonight is not simply a case of constituency special pleading. Indeed, I do not advocate that we should immediately fund the PFI in Tunbridge Wells; nor is it ready to be funded. Rather, there appears to be an acute need in this case, which may be illustrative of other NHS trusts, for proper forward planning and a better long-term framework to enable the trust management to move forward and plan for the future investment that is urgently needed.

The effect of the cancellation of the PFI proposal is not just to abort any future capital work, but to plunge the whole hospital into a state of relative uncertainty, which obviously has an effect on the morale of clinicians and staff. That problem now needs to be addressed.

The hospital's position is untenable in the long term. The trust delivers a good standard of clinical service, but that is despite, not because of, the state of the facilities, which is extremely poor. We rely on the energy, good will, hard work and dedication of the doctors, nurses and management to overcome the impoverished state of our facilities.

The hospital suffers from being split between two sites, both of which are old and have been developed piecemeal over the years. The first site at Pembury was, ironically, originally built as a workhouse in the 1890s. It consists of long, Florence Nightingale-style wards with 24 to 28 beds, an open-plan format, limited privacy and inadequate medical support facilities. For example, oxygen is not piped into the facilities.

Many of the support and related facilities at Pembury are housed in wooden huts. The operating theatres were designed as a twin operating suite some 30 to 40 years ago. The Pembury site includes all the major radiology facilities as well as obstetrics, paediatrics, gynaecology and care for the elderly. The net result is that, every time a patient needs radiology or similar treatment, he has to be transferred between the two sites.

The Kent and Sussex site is in the heart of a very congested part of Tunbridge Wells. It was built around the site of an old tuberculosis hospital, and has been developed higgledy-piggledy over the years. It is poorly laid out. It contains the main accident and emergency facilities for the entire area and is therefore crucial not just for my constituency, but for the surrounding areas.

The effect of the dual site operation is to make the hospital more expensive to run, and also to hinder patient care. One can imagine that transferring patients in poor condition between hospitals, which can take half an hour or so, does not make any sense from a clinical point of view. It is expensive, and it is an unnecessary burden on the staff.

The general standard of the buildings is wholly inadequate for this day and age. On an aerial photograph, it looks like an industrial site. Shed-style buildings, wooden huts and warehouse roofing are simply not an acceptable standard for a modern hospital. Despite this, the staff manage, but it is important to note that there is an estimated £30 million backlog of capital maintenance, which is required to bring the facilities up to what are regarded as acceptable standards today.

Hon. Members will be aware that the capital maintenance allocation is related to turnover, not the state of the buildings. As a result, unless something is done, I fear that the situation at Kent and Sussex can only get worse.

Furthermore, the poor quality of the wards means that the trust is unable to provide patients with the privacy and dignity that they expect today. My constituents continually complain about the inadequate state of the wards and the fact that we have dual-sex wards with no privacy. Tunbridge Wells is—like it or not—the long-term location for accident and emergency and acute facilities. There is no alternative. The nearest hospital, in Maidstone, is far too far away to meet any standards of performance and service delivery on emergency facilities for constituents, particularly those living to the south.

The case for long-term investment, therefore, is very sound by any standards. There is simply no alternative. In my judgment, the PFI proposal should have been allowed to proceed to a state where it could have received mature consideration. It has, however, been turned down, but on technical grounds, not on grounds that can be weighed up as an economic case. In the long term, it will have to be revived.

The PFI was for £65 million to create 400 beds, which compares favourably with other PFIs that have been allowed to proceed. I believe that I am right in saying that the PFI for Dartford was for £120 million to create the same number of beds. The capital efficiency of the proposal was therefore very good. The revenue efficiency is also good, as there would be obvious revenue savings from consolidating a dual site.

Important landholdings would be released as a result of the PFI, because we currently occupy large acreages which are capable of being used for housing, or other uses. The economics of the proposal to rebuild the hospital on a single site is by any standards outstanding.

Why was the PFI turned down? First, it did not meet the criteria, apart from anything else, for readiness—a fact of life, but not a reason, surely, for kicking it into touch indefinitely. Secondly, the service requirement was not sufficiently strongly demonstrated, because the surrounding population are reasonably healthy—but unless we can sustain the quality of service that we have managed in the past, they are unlikely to remain so. The hospital is a centre of excellence today, and deserves our support to remain so. If we are not prepared to invest in it, it will not remain so. Surely the Government's policy for the NHS is not to level down standards but to increase standards everywhere.

My fear is that, if a coherent investment plan is not developed, in the future there will be an obvious impact on morale—which there has been already—and a risk that our top physicians will migrate elsewhere. There is a risk that standards of care will deteriorate and it will not be possible to maintain and meet minimum standards of cleanliness, hygiene and clinical care.

There is also a risk to the economics, because, unless we have a plan, the temptation will be to invest in one site or another at the cost of meeting the long-term objectives. In other words, the costs will be wasted, because in the long term we want to consolidate on a single site. Today, it is simply not possible to ignore the deteriorating state of our buildings.

The Minister of State said in July:

> "Today the Government is unlocking the PFI gridlock in the NHS".

In June, he said:

> "I wanted to be the Minister that got hospitals built, not the Minister that only promised them."

Those are sentiments that I am sure we all share.

I fear, however, that, by selecting certain PFIs to go ahead and kicking the rest into touch, we may have deferred any sensible long-term planning for hospital building, particularly in this case. We have moved out of one gridlock into, potentially, another. Meanwhile, the hospital management are in a Catch-22 situation. They have been told not to invest in further developing the PFI proposal, so that has been shelved, and no more work can be done on developing the right proposal for the future of Tunbridge Wells.

I am also aware that the Minister said in July that it was

> "not the end of the road"

for the schemes that had been turned down, but it is unclear today what can be done to revive them. According to a letter sent to me on 29 July, it was the intention to

> "prioritise all future major acute sector projects according to the key criteria of health service needs."

The point about needs is that it is not just a question of today's needs; it is a question of future needs and future trends. We are talking about a long-term building project, and we are considering not what happens today, but what should happen in five or 10 years' time. The NHS trust needs to know that in order to prioritise what it does with its expected investment now. Currently, it is being left in the dark.

We fully recognise that health service expenditure must be prioritised, and that some schemes must be selected to go ahead. That is not the issue; the issue is what happens to schemes when there is an acute need for redevelopment, but they have been booted into the long grass for the time being.

The Government made a great commitment to the health service in their election manifesto. In the past few years, they have been highly critical of the last Government's record on health, and have made much play of the need to improve facilities and reduce waiting lists—which in Tunbridge Wells, incidentally, are in serious danger of lengthening again this winter; but that is another subject.

Now is the time to reassure hospitals such as the Kent and Sussex about their long-term future. That is really all we are looking for—a plan for the long term. That means not a stop-go on PFI schemes, but a coherent framework in which to plan, and some understanding of how schemes will be run and of the wherewithal to fund them and bring them to a state in which we can advocate them and make a proposal to the Government.

In short, I am asking the Minister to reassure us that he will look favourably on future plans for the redevelopment of the NHS trust, and to ensure that, in the months ahead, the trust is provided with clear guidance on the type of capital expenditure programme that will be allowed to enable single-site relocation in the long term.

In other words, are we to invest in both sites, or can we start concentrating on a single site in the knowledge that in the future a scheme will be supported? I also seek the Minister's reassurance that the NHS trust will be allowed to incur the expenditure necessary in the future to get a proposal into the state in which it can receive his blessing.

I believe that the issue is vital not just to my constituents, but to constituencies in surrounding areas and, I suspect, to other NHS trusts in a similar position. Proposals for redevelopment of the trust have not just my support, but the support of all the surrounding Members of Parliament, the community health council, the area health authority, the ambulance service, patients, local GPs—to many of whom I have spoken—and, of course, the borough and county councils.

Now is the time to provide clear directions for the future of a sensible, and indeed affordable, proposal. We do not want our PFI to be kicked into the long grass and to become stuck in the treacle of bureaucracy; we want firm direction and positive action, in the interests of all concerned.

10.13 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Has there been an agreement?

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The Chair should always be informed.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I apologise for that omission, Madam Speaker.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) on raising this matter, and warmly support what he has said. My constituency abuts his, and the health authority that dominates the constituency pays some £5 million for special services from the hospitals to which he referred. There is clearly considerable collaboration between the health authorities concerned.

I understand that, when we are considering questions of adjustment, financial matters—although important—must not be the overriding consideration. As my hon. Friend recognised, important services are involved, providing important treatments that can benefit my constituents because the hospitals are so close to them. If we were not to have this relationship, and services were moved to Maidstone, it would put an unbearable burden on my constituents, who would have to travel 30 or more miles to the district hospitals on the south coast.

10.14 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) on his first speech in the House on health matters. The right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) gave him ample support. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's interest in the Government's programme to renew the national health service. I share his concern that the citizens of Tunbridge Wells—and, indeed, of every other constituency—should enjoy the best health care, delivered in the best facilities by the best clinicians. That is what the NHS sets out to deliver, and what the Government are determined to secure.

I also pay tribute to the staff of the hon. Gentleman's two local hospitals—one on the outskirts of town and the other in the centre—who deliver high-quality care, sometimes in difficult circumstances.

The hon. Gentleman has raised with me tonight and in correspondence his concern about the fact that the project to rationalise services of the Kent and Sussex Weald trust on to a single site at Pembury was not prioritised as a PFI project in July. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns, but it may be helpful if I briefly explain to the House precisely why prioritisation of PFI schemes was considered necessary, how schemes were chosen, and the implications for those such as Kent and Sussex that were not prioritised. I know that he wants to look to the future rather than rake over the past, but it is important that I address the issues that he has raised.

When the Government took office, we inherited from the previous Administration what I can only describe as a fantasy hospital building programme. Scores of hospital developments were trumpeted, with, as I remember well, capital values the size of telephone numbers and start dates that we were continually promised were just around the corner. We had been promised project signings at the rate of one a month. Unfortunately, not a single project materialised. Despite the promises of jam tomorrow, not a single hospital was built through the PFI process under the previous Administration.

The previous Government's overblown optimism about their hospital building programme was not matched by the private sector, which had invested much time and money in developing proposals that seemed to be going nowhere. There was confusion about the rules, uncertainty about the legislation, and an impossibly large number of potential schemes to manage and deliver.

The Government were elected on a mandate to sort out the mess that PFI had become. It was never going to be an overnight job, and the work continues today. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that we have made enormous progress. On taking office, the Paymaster General appointed Mr. Malcolm Bates to review the operation of PFI right across government, and he accepted every one of Mr. Bates's subsequent recommendations.

Meanwhile, the Department of Health undertook its own review. It was clear that, as a matter of priority, we had to secure the market for PFI, and we set about doing that in two ways. We prioritised the 43 major acute schemes in the pipeline, and we enacted legislation to clarify the powers of trusts to enter into PFI contracts.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, on 3 July I announced the outcome of prioritisation. I was able to announce 14 major new hospital schemes with a total capital value of £1,300 million: the biggest new hospital building programme in the history of the national health service. That unlocked the gridlock. Most importantly, it secured the confidence of the private and public sectors in the ability of public-private partnerships to benefit patients by providing new services on the ground. That confidence was given a further boost on 14 July when the National Health Service (Private Finance) Act 1997 entered the statute book. The Government promise was delivered. Just a few weeks ago I was proud to be able to visit the Darenth Park project at Dartford and Gravesham. The trust there already has the builders at work and ahead of schedule. I have no doubt that the concrete proof there will be replicated throughout the country as schemes are brought to fruition.

I am pleased to note that the bond that has been used to finance a new hospital for the people of Carlisle, the first NHS/PFI scheme to be funded through the capital markets, will be launched tomorrow. I fully expect work to begin on that scheme by the beginning of next month.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I invite the Minister to visit Carlisle when building work starts on the hospital. We have a split site, and we have been working for 20 years for a new hospital. The Minister's news will be welcomed in my constituency.

Mr. Milburn: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for being at the forefront of the local campaign to secure a new hospital for Carlisle. That long campaign has had a rich reward in the new development, and I should be delighted to accept his invitation to see progress when building starts.

In the context of Kent and Sussex Weald, I draw no comfort from the fact that many schemes have had to be stood down. I have no doubt that there is a demonstrable health service need for such schemes, and that the NHS would be improved if the projects were given the go-ahead. If it had been possible to deliver all 43 projects, I would have delivered them, particularly if that could have been done at an affordable price. However, I am afraid that arguments continued to rage in the constituency of the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells about the affordability of the scheme in the lead-up to the prioritisation exercise.

I have no apologies about the outcome of prioritising, because not all the schemes could have been delivered. A preferred bidder had not even been selected for Kent and Sussex Weald when prioritisation took place. As I think the hon. Member knows, more generally, resources were spread too thinly, expertise was lacking, and precious NHS cash was spent trying to breathe life into schemes that were just not ready.

The NHS spent a total of £30 million in management consultancy fees alone desperately trying to get PFI schemes off the ground, and there was not a single hospital project to show for it. I was not prepared to allow that waste to continue. Instead, we took the decision to prioritise on the basis of three criteria: health service need, project status and PFI-ability. We did that openly and objectively, and the results were published in full. Again I make no apology for that, because in my view health service need should always be the key determinant in progressing NHS schemes.

The hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells was right to point to the advantages that would have accrued to the Kent and Sussex Weald trust if its project had been prioritised. As he rightly said, the trust currently operates on a split site—on the outskirts of Tunbridge Wells and in the centre of town—and the operational and training difficulties that that creates have been well documented. He alluded to them.

It is perhaps a sad indictment of the recent history of the NHS and of the hon. Member's party's mismanagement of it that in terms of health service need, Kent and Sussex Weald, despite pressing needs, was a considerable way down the list and below other potential projects whose need was greater. For health service need, Kent and Sussex Weald scored three out of a possible five where five represents greatest need. In the categories of PFI status and PFI-ability, the project scored only one out of five and nought out of five respectively. It was therefore considered extremely unlikely to reach financial close within 18 months, not least because the support of local health care commissioners was likely to depend on a more affordable, and therefore restructured, proposal.

The question then, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, is what happens to the schemes that were not prioritised for the first PFI wave. The answer is that schemes that were not prioritised for the first wave are eligible for consideration by the capital prioritisation advisory group within the NHS executive. The group will consider the merits of eligible schemes, including, specifically, their health service need. In future, the key determinant of where capital projects take place in the NHS will be a simple one: whether those projects are most needed.

As configured under the previous Government, the PFI system did not take NHS need into account as the key determinant of where capital projects were to be developed. Instead, the philosophy of "let a thousand flowers bloom" meant that a thousand flowers did not bloom. Unfortunately, no flowers bloomed. Instead, the NHS wasted precious resources, precious time and precious skill trying to conjure schemes out of nowhere. The consequences were clear for all people to see: it failed. This prioritisation exercise, where NHS need will be the determining driver, will ensure that the most needed capital developments take place quickly.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support that approach. He asked for sensible long-term planning, and that is what he will get through this route. The group will work closely with the Treasury task force in making its recommendations, and it will be for Ministers ultimately to decide which schemes should go ahead. Work is already under way to prepare for scheme selection, and I expect to be able to announce the next tranche of PFI schemes in the spring.

The hon. Gentleman asked what the best thing to do was. The best thing to do for his trust, for himself and for the right hon. Member for Wealden is to alert the regional office to the needs of their constituents, and to try to persuade the office that this is a much needed scheme. The office may therefore decide that this is the sort of project that it would like advanced for national prioritisation.

The benefits will be clear for all. In particular, the private sector will know that schemes selected on that basis have every prospect of success. We anticipate considerable competition to deliver them. Needless to say, the bid that succeeds will be the one that offers best quality and value for money. Those schemes that are not considered PFI-able—and there may be some—may be considered for available public sector capital.

I do not expect the hon. Gentleman to agree that his local trust should not have been prioritised, but I hope that he will acknowledge that, since the announcement on 3 July, the trust's perspective has changed. The fact that the trust did not appeal against my decision when it could have done is a sure sign of its realism about the poor status of its previous PFI bid.

More positively, and looking to the future, I understand that the trust is now working on a collaborative agenda with Mid-Kent Healthcare NHS trust, and that it is likely that any future project proposal will take account of collaboration on site strategy, and possibly involve all three major sites—at Maidstone, Pembury, and Kent and Sussex. I have no doubt that, if a successful partnership can be forged to effect a strategy for the whole region, the hon. Gentleman's constituents can only benefit.

The Government also believe in co-operation and in partnership. We will continue to pursue our successful strategy of public-private partnerships, of which the PFI is one model. Our review of the PFI in the NHS continues, with a review of the procurement process and of the PFI product. We want deals to be quicker, better value for money, high quality, even more innovative, but, most of all, driven by that key determinant of NHS need. The NHS, taxpayers and, most important, local patients will benefit from that approach. I look forward to receiving the full support of the hon. Gentleman and of the right hon. Member for Wealden in that endeavour.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 28 October 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

For the county constituency of Winchester, in the room of Mark Oaten Esquire, whose election on 1 May 1997 has been declared to be void.—[*Mr. Tyler.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Single Currency

1. **Mr. Hawkins:** What is Her Majesty's Government's policy on joining the arrangements for a single currency on 1 January 1999. [12111]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): As the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear in his statement yesterday, British membership of a single currency in 1999 could not meet the five economic tests that the Government have set out. The Government will therefore be notifying our European partners that we shall not seek membership of the single currency on 1 January 1999.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the Foreign Secretary now answer the question that the Chancellor of the Exchequer so obviously ducked yesterday: will the Government be applying for European funding to propagandise for our joining the euro?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to say that we shall not be making any such application. It is a decision for the British people. As we assured the House yesterday, if and when the Government should take a decision to join the single currency, we shall put the matter to a referendum of the British people, who will have the final veto, as is their right.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Foreign Secretary tell the House what proposals he has and what pressure he intends to put on the European Union to ensure that any central bank is democratically controlled and is accountable to an elected body somewhere, rather than its being an unelected organisation dictating economic policies to member states?

Mr. Cook: My colleague the Chancellor of the Exchequer yesterday made it clear that it is, and long has been, our policy to press for a strengthening of ECOFIN so that it can set broad economic parameters and strategy within which the central bank would operate. That remains our position, and we shall continue to work for it.

Mr. Howard: Yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated that it was not the Government's intention to join the exchange rate mechanism. How do the Government square that with the exchange rate mechanism requirements of the Maastricht treaty?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to confirm what the Chancellor said yesterday, which is that we have no intention of joining the exchange rate mechanism. As he himself said, there have been many changes to that exchange rate mechanism since the Maastricht treaty. What will be required of us, should and when we ever wish to join the single currency, is evidence of currency stability. That can be perfectly well arranged without membership of the ERM.

Mr. Howard: Will then the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the effect of that answer is that the pound will shadow the euro for at least two years before any date of entry to EMU?

Mr. Cook: No, I can confirm no such thing. We have made it perfectly plain that we do not intend to join the ERM. We have also made it perfectly plain, if and when it appears to be in Britain's economic interest, that we will join. I am bound to say that I thought that that would have been welcomed by the right hon. and learned Gentleman. In the past three months, his party has gone through three different policies on the euro—

Mr. Howard: Answer the question.

Mr. Cook: I have answered the question. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's party began by ruling the euro out for several decades; it then ruled it out for one decade, and now it rules it out for the foreseeable future. It is a matter of relief to the country that the Conservatives will be in opposition for several decades to sort out their policy.

Mr. Skinner: Is my right hon. Friend aware that I am pleased that the Government will not apply to join the exchange rate mechanism? After what happened on 16 September 1992, that would be like a dog returning to its vomit.

Mr. Cook: I think that my hon. Friend will wish me to clarify to the House that it was not our vomit, but that of the Conservatives. He puts his finger on one of the reasons why we are in office and they are out of office.

Indonesia

2. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** If he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's relations with the ASEAN group of nations with particular reference to Indonesia. [12112]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): We have good relations with ASEAN countries. My right hon. Friend the Foreign

Secretary's visit in August to four ASEAN countries, including Indonesia, underlined the importance that we attach to the region.

Mr. Winterton: Does the Minister accept that Indonesia, which is the fourth largest country in the world by population, is a powerful member of the ASEAN group and an important trade outlet for the United Kingdom? Does he not believe that we should treat Indonesia as well as we treat the People's Republic of China—a country where democracy is non-existent and which has a desperately bad human rights record?

Mr. Fatchett: We have good and constructive relations with Indonesia. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met President Suharto and Foreign Minister Alatas during his visit. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman saw the press statements on the outcome of those meetings and will be impressed by the commitment on both sides to the continuing commercial relationship.

Mr. Sheerman: I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his successful recent visit to Indonesia. May I press the Minister a little further on what progress was made on agreements to encourage proper trading relationships with Indonesia? Will Indonesia become a burgeoning market for this country, apart from in certain sensitive materials?

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend recognises the importance of Indonesia as a commercial market. We seek to keep that market open and we will do all that we can to ensure that British goods and services are available at commercial prices in Indonesia. We look forward with great confidence to developing our position in that market.

Dr. Tonge: Will the Secretary of State explain why, given his avowed intention not to trade with countries that have bad human rights records, another 11 arms contracts with Indonesia were signed during the summer recess?

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Lady is misinformed about the Government's policy. We have a series of objectives. Human rights is one, but many others come into play. We have judged each of the contracts to which the hon. Lady refers against the criteria that we have published and we shall continue to make decisions on any contract against those criteria. We are able to do that openly, which the previous Administration were not.

Middle East Peace Process

3. **Mr. Burden:** If he will make a statement on his assessment of progress in the middle east peace process. [12113]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Government share the widespread concern at the lack of progress in the middle east peace process. I spoke with the United States Secretary of State before and after her recent visit to the region. I very much welcome the fact that it has produced a resumption of dialogue, which will have our full support.

Mr. Burden: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. We all want success in the middle east peace process. Does he share my concern at statements made this week by the Israeli Prime Minister that illegal settlement building will continue? Will he tell the House how the Government can assist in persuading Israel that it, along with other parties, should take time out from unilateral actions? That should include illegal settlement building in east Jerusalem and elsewhere.

Mr. Cook: We have fully endorsed the demand by Madeleine Albright for the Israeli Government to take time out from settlement building in the occupied territories. It is extremely important, if we are to make progress at the negotiating table, that the process should not be undermined by provocative acts on the ground. What is required is an outcome that offers a permanent peace on the basis of security for the Israeli people and justice for the Palestinian people.

Mr. Soames: What is the nature of the representations that the Foreign Secretary has made to the Government of Israel following the attempted assassination of a Palestinian citizen in Jordan? Does he agree that that is the most astonishing and wicked act? Will he tell the Government of Israel that the British Government cannot share their ambitions in this respect and that they wish to see them begin to make progress in the peace talks, not merely act in a duplicitous manner?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that we have registered our condemnation in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv. The Government fully condemn terrorist acts. We are anxious to ensure that terrorism is halted, but we believe that one does not halt terrorism by adopting the tactics of the terrorist.

Dr. Starkey: The Minister will be aware that I recently visited the west bank and Gaza to see for myself the effects on the ground of the Israeli policy of internal closures. Those policies have resulted in Gaza being shut off for, on average, one day in three over the past three years. They have resulted in 65 per cent. unemployment and in Palestinians suffering from less freedom of movement than was the case before the Oslo agreement was signed, which has obviously had a detrimental effect on Palestinian public opinion. Can the Minister assure me that he is taking action to make representations to the Israeli Government, either directly or through the European Union, to get them to stop the unproductive policy of internal closures?

Mr. Cook: I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that one of the positive effects of Madeleine Albright's visit was a sharp reduction in the Israeli Government's closure programme. I fully endorse my hon. Friend's general points. The closure process has resulted in a sharp increase in unemployment and a loss of economic trade throughout the Palestinian entity. It is important that the Israeli Government should take on board the fact that they are unlikely to succeed in the peace process if the Palestinian people find that, throughout the peace process, their standard of living goes down rather than up.

European Union Enlargement

4. **Mr. Pickthall:** If he will make a statement on the enlargement of the European Union. [12115]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): Enlargement is a central objective for the United Kingdom and the European Union. It will enhance security and prosperity in Europe, and is strongly in the national interest. We look forward to EU decisions, in December, on the early opening of enlargement negotiations. Reform of key policies is essential if enlargement is to be successful.

Mr. Pickthall: Does my hon. Friend agree that, desirable though enlargement is, it is incompatible with the common agricultural policy in its present form? How does he see substantial reform of the CAP meshing with the movement towards enlargement, which most of us wish to see?

Mr. Henderson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that there is a need for reform of the common agricultural policy. That need would be there even if enlargement of the European Union were not under consideration. The fact that enlargement is a top priority for the British presidency of the EU means that we shall give top priority in the negotiations in Luxembourg in December to seeking reform of the agricultural system in order to bring prices more in line with world prices.

Mr. Tyrie: Will the Government give a commitment that they will protect Britain's rebate from the European Community budget in those negotiations? Will they further make a commitment that, in those negotiations, they will press for reform of the complete European Community budget to bring about a sharp reduction in the unacceptably large contribution that we now make to the European Community?

Mr. Henderson: The answer to the first question in yes; we will protect the abatement. The answer to the second question is that we are firm in the belief that the Edinburgh criteria on the future size of the aggregate budget—1.27 per cent. of gross national product—should be a sticking point. During negotiations with our European partners, we have realised that there is increasing consensus behind that position.

Mr. David Heath: Given that the Minister has agreed that common agricultural policy reform, along with structural reform and many other essential reforms, must precede any enlargement of the European Union, what measures did the Government take at Amsterdam to ensure that progress was made on those issues? How soon shall we see progress during the British presidency?

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman knows that some of those issues were covered in Amsterdam. The main forum for discussion will be the Luxembourg summit in December. Last weekend at Mondorf, I discussed those issues, among others, with other European Union Foreign Ministers. Achieving a way forward on structural funds, the budget, agricultural policy and enlargement are top priorities in our negotiations.

Ann Clwyd: The Government have been critical of Turkey and its human rights record. Can my hon. Friend assure us that there will be no further support for Turkey while it continues to violate the rights of Kurds living in Turkey and to bomb the Kurds in northern Iraq, as has occurred almost daily since 13 October? What representations have been made to stop that bombing?

Mr. Henderson: I visited Turkey three weeks ago and raised those issues with the Turkish Government. I made it clear that, while Britain believes that there is a strong case for Turkey to be included in the European conference because of its important geo-political situation and other reasons, it cannot be without condition. Turkey must improve democracy, and that involves a change of attitude to the Kurdish community, progress on human rights and economic reform. All those points were made to the Turkish Government as well as specific representations in respect of the recent incidents to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. Streeter: Do the Government now regret not pushing the agenda for enlargement more energetically at Amsterdam? Does the Minister regret pushing for deepening rather than widening the EU? Will he clarify his Government's policy? Is it their policy to press the European Commission to open its arms more widely to other central and eastern European states and not just to the five plus one? Will he clarify that matter?

Mr. Henderson: I am extremely surprised that the hon. Gentleman should refer to the Government making an impact on the negotiations at Amsterdam. His Government could not even find a dialogue with the other European Union countries, never mind have any influence on them. He is the last hon. Member I would have expected to raise that question. In relation to the 10 countries plus Cyprus seeking membership of the European Union, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we support the European Commission proposals that negotiations should begin with five countries plus Cyprus, but other understandings on the way forward for the other five countries should be an important focus of the negotiations at Luxembourg.

Entry Clearance (Islamabad)

5. **Fiona Mactaggart:** On what dates during 1997 the computer system at Islamabad has failed to operate properly; and how applicants for entry clearance have been informed of the consequences for their applications of problems caused by computer failures. [12116]

Mr. Fatchett: During 1997, the computer system at Islamabad has failed to operate properly between 2 and 20 May and between 16 June and 13 July. Applicants for entry clearance were informed of the consequences for applications by means of advertisements placed in the national newspapers. Where interviews were imminent but had to be postponed, applicants were informed by letter. A new system was installed in September and is working well.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank the Minister for that reply and congratulate him on the fact that a new system has been installed. Frankly, it was desperately needed. Many of my constituents have suffered as a result of the delays caused by the breakdown of the previous system. It occurs to me that, since the installation of the new system, there has been a reduction in the number of applications and fewer people have been able to visit their relatives here. Given the difficulties that people have faced and the fact that Islamabad is the largest visa-issuing post for Britain, does the Minister have any proposals to make the process easier?

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend is right to point out that the situation that we inherited in Islamabad was far from satisfactory. I am delighted to say that we have taken immediate action in respect of the information technology. We have additional good news in that there are five new entry clearance posts, which we expect to be filled by next January. That should facilitate the process and ensure that individuals get a proper deal.

Mr. Swayne: Oh joy, joy!

Mr. Fatchett: If the hon. Gentleman feels that people should not be given justice just because they come from Pakistan, that shows how out of touch he and his party are. To finish the litany of good news, my colleague Baroness Symons now has two additional posts in her private office to ensure that correspondence from hon. Members is dealt with more quickly.

Kashmir

6. **Mr. Pike:** What recent discussions the Government have had with representatives of the Indian and Pakistan Governments on the issue of Kashmir. [12117]

Mr. Robin Cook: I discussed Kashmir with senior political figures during the recent visit to Pakistan and India. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also had the opportunity to meet the Prime Ministers of both countries at the weekend. Britain continues to be willing to help, but any offer of help must be acceptable to both countries.

Mr. Pike: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he recognises that there is considerable international concern about the on-going conflict in Kashmir between India and Pakistan, in which more than 1,000 people have been killed in the past 12 months? During recent months, there has been renewed shelling over the line of control. Will he make it clear that it is the Government's policy to give full support to the bilateral talks between India and Pakistan, with the hope that that leads to a conclusion of the conflict, while recognising that Pakistan and India have more to gain than anybody else from the solution to the problem?

Mr. Cook: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The two countries have a lot to gain from bilateral discussion, particularly by an improvement in trade, which is at present only 1 per cent. of their two gross domestic products. We warmly welcome the fact that the Prime Minister of India has initiated such a bilateral dialogue and we were glad that we were able at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting to ensure that both of them had the opportunity to have a further bilateral dialogue, which I understand went well.

Dr. Fox: Who authorised Government spin doctors to try to blacken the name of our high commissioner in India, David Gore-Booth? It is surely correct to blame not the servants but the masters for the failures of foreign policy. When will amateur hour at the Foreign Office come to an end?

Mr. Cook: No spin doctor and no official at the Foreign Office has uttered any hostile word to David Gore-Booth, who behaved—*[Interruption.]* I am happy to assure the House that that is exactly so. I have seen no reference in any British newspaper to any suggestion that any British spin doctor, official, news briefer—whatever one chooses to call them—has uttered a word of hostility to David Gore-Booth. On the contrary, I have myself said that he conducted himself with great dignity in sometimes very difficult circumstances.

Mr. Terry Davis: Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that, in deciding the future of Kashmir, the most important people are the Kashmiri people themselves?

Mr. Cook: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that although the solution is primarily for both countries to find, that solution, if it is to be permanent and acceptable, must be acceptable to all the peoples of Kashmir: Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist.

Mr. Faber: Can the right hon. Gentleman clear up the confusion that he caused on "Today" two weeks ago when he said that the state visit to India had been an unqualified success, but that it was all the fault of the previous Government for arranging it at the wrong time?

Mr. Cook: I shall happily repeat to the hon. Gentleman that I think that it would have been better to be able to look forward to the next 50 years rather than backwards to the past 50 years. I am happy that he has noticed that the state visit was an unqualified success.

Mr. Faber: That is what you said.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman used my own words. Her Majesty was greeted with immense warmth by the people of India and our trade exhibition was an outstanding success. It would be helpful if Opposition Members recognised the contribution that Her Majesty has made to Anglo-Indian relations rather than running it down.

Mr. Galloway: Does the Foreign Secretary accept that, far from being a failure, his policy on Kashmir has millions of friends in this country and around the world who have been greatly cheered by his courage in standing up for an ethical foreign policy on behalf of a people who have been oppressed for the best part of the past 50 years by a Government—India—who have failed to implement the United Nations resolutions calling for self-determination for the people of that occupied territory? Has he had the chance to see the United States State Department report, which has described the line of control between India and Pakistan in Kashmir as the most dangerous flashpoint in international relations today—both sides of course having nuclear potential?

Mr. Cook: I am well aware of the report to which my hon. Friend refers. He is right to make the point that the issue is of legitimate interest because both countries have near, perhaps undeclared, nuclear capacity. The issue will remain at the front of many minds.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Following the Foreign Secretary's notorious visit to Pakistan and India, would not the best way to solve the Kashmir problem be a period of quiet reflection by the British Government? Does not the difficult problem of Kashmir demonstrate that it would be dangerous for the British Government to act as an arbiter?

Mr. Cook: As I understand it, I am accused of having said that Britain would be willing to help to find a just solution. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Prime Minister whom he supported in the previous Government said last April:

"we are prepared to help in the search for a solution".—[*Official Report*, 23 April 1996; Vol. 276, c. 192.]

It is pure humbug to suggest that such an offer is statesmanship when made by a Tory Prime Minister, but lack of tact when made by a Labour Foreign Secretary.

Bosnia

7. **Mr. Barnes:** If he will make a statement on progress towards meeting the Dayton accords with respect to Bosnia. [12118]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): We are making excellent progress with the tougher approach to peace implementation that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary agreed with his steering board colleagues at Sintra in May, but much more remains to be done and we shall be keeping the pressure up until it is. I shall make that clear to all three parties when I visit Bosnia this week.

Mr. Barnes: Are not the Bosnian Serbs driving a coach and horses through the Dayton accord by refusing to hand over indicted war criminals to the court in The Hague? Is it not essential that the criminals should be handed over, if lasting peace is to be achieved in Yugoslavia and if refugees are to be returned to the areas that they came from?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend raises a real question. The Bosnian Serbs should learn the clear lesson given by the Bosnian Croats when Kordic and the other nine Bosnian Croats went to The Hague to face the charges against them. We expect the same from all indictees, whether Bosnian Serbs or Bosnian Croats. On the question of the return of refugees, my hon. Friend will be glad to know that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has a programme to return 100,000 refugees this year. Already, 83,000 have returned and the programme is on course. That is good news. Progress has been made and will continue to be made.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Minister said that he was keeping pressure on the three parties concerned. Does he agree that he might also need to keep pressure on the Americans, who hosted the Dayton accord, because there seems to be a growing lobby in that country for withdrawing to an offshore commitment, instead of a hands-on commitment in Bosnia?

Mr. Lloyd: Let me place on record that we work closely with the Americans and all our allies in Bosnia. Progress is being made. For example, the problems caused by corruption have seen Mrs. Plavsic break with the Pale crowd, including Karadzic and his cronies, in her anti-corruption drive. We have seen the seizure by the Stabilisation Force of the transmitters in Pale, which stopped the transmission of the daily messages of hate. Transmissions will be stopped until we get an agreement from the Bosnian Serbs in Pale that messages of hate are a thing of the past. We have seen an effort by our troops in Prijedor in arresting indictees, which gives a signal to all indictees that we expect to see them at The Hague. We shall see them at The Hague. Progress is being made, because all the allies are working together in the Dayton framework.

Cyprus

8. **Mr. Hanson:** What plans he has to meet the UN envoy to Cyprus to discuss the outcome of recent initiatives by the UN. [12119]

12. **Mr. Waterson:** What progress has been made in the talks about the future of Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [12123]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no present plans to meet Mr. Cordovez, whom I met on 18 August. The Foreign Secretary discussed prospects for Cyprus with the United Nations Secretary-General in September, and assured him we would remain actively supportive of his efforts on Cyprus.

Negotiations took place in July and August under the auspices of the UN between the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus. Those talks produced no definitive results, but the United Kingdom welcomes the intention of the UN to resume talks in early 1998.

Mr. Hanson: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Can he assure the House that the British Government, in any future negotiations, will ensure that the sovereignty of Cyprus continues and that United Nations resolutions are maintained? Will he also give especial emphasis to the issue of missing persons when Cyprus is discussed again? I welcome the Government's efforts in helping to move the process along.

Mr. Henderson: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and I can give him the assurance that he seeks on the question of the sovereignty of Cyprus. We believe that the negotiators should consider the issue of missing persons as part of their agenda and I hope that they can reach a solution that is acceptable to all involved.

Mr. Waterson: Does the Minister agree with the recent motion passed by the European Parliament which criticised—yet again—the attitude of the leader of the northern Cypriot regime, Mr. Denktas, to the negotiations? Is it not the case that, in these negotiations and on many occasions before, the belligerence and lack of co-operation of Mr. Denktas have prevented progress from being made?

Mr. Henderson: I hope that all the people of Cyprus recognise that the world is different from the one in which the current divisions were drawn up, many years ago. All those who can bring some intelligence to the process of resolving the difficulties must do what they can. During my recent visit to Turkey, I asked the Turkish Government to put any pressure they could on Mr. Denktas and his colleagues to be positive, and the same message has gone to our friends in the southern part of Cyprus.

Mr. Evans: Not only do we have a special relationship with Cyprus, but we have a special responsibility for it and its people. Will the Minister ensure that the talks on the accession of Cyprus to the EU will not exacerbate the problems? Will he ensure also that the sensitivities of the people living north and south of the green line are taken on board?

Mr. Henderson: The EU's decision to open talks with Cyprus on its accession to the Union is, as the hon. Gentleman will know, a prior commitment accepted by the Government when we took office. It is one which we welcome and will honour. Every effort must be made by all parties to solve the difficulties in the communities, as that will allow accession to take place successfully.

Indonesia

9. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** What assessment he has made of the foreign policy factors leading to the sale of Hawk jets to the Indonesian Government. [12120]

Mr. Fatchett: None. Any future application to export licensable defence equipment will be considered against the new criteria that we announced on 28 July.

Mr. Bruce: I am sorry that the Minister has not got to grips with this matter. The decision to sell Hawk jets was made by the previous Labour Government two or three years after the takeover of East Timor. The House and the country would like to know why the Government, who are looking at ethical issues in arms sales, believe that we should not sell Land Rovers to Indonesia some 22 years after the takeover of East Timor, whereas the previous Labour Government sold jets to Indonesia a couple of years after that country—some say because they were urged to do so by the American and British Governments at the time—took over East Timor. It is a confusing issue. May we have some clarification?

Mr. Fatchett: I am rather confused by the hon. Gentleman's question. Is he urging the Government to stop the sale of Hawks? If so, he should look at all the faces around him and consider the commercial interests represented by his hon. Friends. We have published clear guidelines for the sale of defence equipment and we will judge every export licence against those criteria. We will take no lectures from the hon. Gentleman and other Conservatives who, when in government, armed Saddam Hussein and cost this country £750 million of taxpayers' money. The Conservatives have no right to talk on these issues—their record is appalling.

Dr. Palmer: Is my hon. Friend aware of the widespread support, not just among Labour supporters, for the new approach to foreign policy, and in particular the Government's willingness to look again at the sale of Hawk jets, which concerns a great many people who feel that they will be used to support oppression in the area claimed by Indonesia?

Mr. Fatchett: I welcome my hon. Friend's warm support for our foreign policy and, in particular, for the arms criteria which we published in July. He may also be interested to know that Jose Ramos Horta, the East Timorean, made a clear statement in Mozambique 10 days or so ago, in which he also expressed strong support for the ethical foreign policy of the Labour Government in the United Kingdom and for our approach to exports and defence sales.

Mr. Blunt: Is not the truth that, considering the licences for arms sales to Indonesia that were disallowed by the previous Government and the licensing of Hawks under the present Government, foreign policy is neither more nor less ethical than it was before 1 May? The only victim of the soundbite diplomacy of the past six months has been the British national interest, as we learn that Malaysia has signed a £1 billion contract for patrol ships with a German company, when Vosper Thornycroft thought that it was in pole position, and that Turkey says in effect that we will be disbarred from a $7.5 billion export market. British jobs and the national interest are bearing the burden of soundbite politics.

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Gentleman has made his argument very clear: he would sell to anyone, anywhere, at any time, and would take no account of the regime and have no regard for human rights. We know where that policy leads: it led to the arming of Saddam Hussein and to the loss of taxpayers' money. It is time that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues understood the failures of the previous Government and recognised the new Government's positive policies.

Lockerbie

10. **Mr. Dalyell:** If he will make a statement about his meeting with the Lord Advocate in September on the issues arising out of new information on Lockerbie and Libyan sanctions. [12121]

Mr. Robin Cook: I met my noble Friend the Lord Advocate on 4 September. His view remains that the available evidence supports the case against the two accused Libyans, and that there is no evidence of the involvement of nationals of any other country in the Lockerbie bombing. I fully accept that assessment.

It is for the Libyan authorities to fulfil their clear duty to surrender the two men accused of that act of mass murder to stand trial in Scotland. I am today inviting the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Arab League and the Organisation of African Unity to send a delegation to Scotland, to show them the judicial system there and to discuss arrangements for a trial in Scotland with international observers.

Mr. Dalyell: Since one of the reasons given by the Foreign Secretary for objecting to a trial on Lockerbie in The Hague is that the Americans might refuse to submit evidence that they held to a court outside Scotland or the United States, can we reflect on why the Americans should do that? Is there a suggestion that the Americans might be unwilling, after nine years, to give information to the Dumfries and Galloway police?

Mr. Cook: We have had full co-operation throughout from the United States authorities and they have shared fully with the investigating powers all the evidence available to them. It would not be possible, however, to mount a prosecution without the co-operation of the US authorities, who hold part of the evidence. Most of those killed on the Pan Am jet were Americans, and the majority of their relatives do not want a trial to take place outside Scotland or the United States.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the interest of those who lost their relatives in the dreadful disaster is that a trial should take place and the guilty parties be identified and punished, is the Foreign Secretary really saying that there are no circumstances in which he will consider a trial outside Scotland, especially as the Libyans have already said that they would willingly surrender the two accused to an independent party—perhaps Egypt—if the trial were held in any third country?

Mr. Cook: If I may correct the hon. Gentleman, what happened at Lockerbie was not a disaster; it was murder. No one in the House should forget that. I find it strange that it should be argued that a trial by Scots judges under Scots law in another country would be fair, but a trial by Scots judges under Scots law in Scotland would not. We have nothing to be defensive about concerning the impartiality of our courts, and I shall be proud to display that when I meet the delegation.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: I welcome the Foreign Secretary's announcement of the invitations that he has extended. Is the assertion that no fair trial can be obtained in Scotland not only unfounded but unnecessarily provocative? If the test of fairness of a judicial system is transparency, does not the Scottish system stand comparison with many others, including the Libyan system? May not fairness be established by the presence of independent observers at every stage of the legal process?

Mr. Cook: The hon. and learned Gentleman makes some fair points about the nature of the Scottish legal system. It is, after all, the legal system to which we subject our citizens. I see no reason why there should be a separate system for those from Libya, but I understood that other countries may not be so persuaded. That is why I have made in good faith the offer that we are willing to discuss any reservations that other countries may have, confident in the knowledge that we can put them right. We would welcome monitors and observers from them at a trial so that justice could not only be done but be seen internationally to be done.

Mr. Godman: It is almost nine years since that terrible night when Pan Am flight 103 fell out of the sky. As one who has all along argued that those deemed guilty of that terrible crime should stand trial in the High Court in Edinburgh and not in America, may I offer my sincere compliments to my right hon. Friend for arguing the case that such a trial should take place in Edinburgh?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support.

Employment Charter

11. **Mr. Walter:** What assessment he has made of the impact on United Kingdom job creation of the United Kingdom's adoption of the employment chapter in the Amsterdam treaty. [12122]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The employment chapter provides a mechanism for the exchange of best practice, for ensuring that employment is taken into consideration in all the Community's activities and for agreeing guidelines to be taken into account in national employment policies. It will have an impact on job creation when member states have identified policies for promoting employability, competitiveness and labour markets responsive to economic change.

Mr. Walter: I am still not clear from that answer how many extra jobs will be created in the United Kingdom as a result of this chapter; nor is it clear what the cost of the incentive measures talked of in the treaty will be or what the impact will be on the Community budget and on the United Kingdom taxpayer.

Mr. Henderson: Of course there are no guarantees on anything in life, but the important thing about job creation is ensuring that Government policies are consistent and helpful to those who are creating jobs in the private sector. That is why our position in Amsterdam was to give every assistance to policies that would improve training and competitiveness. The inclusion of the employment chapter in the treaty gives hope for the future, not only for Britain but for other European countries.

Mr. Gapes: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that the European Union stands not simply for a free market but for social and employment aspects that affect millions of people throughout our continent? For that reason, many hon. Members are delighted that there is now an employment chapter in the European Union.

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I can reassure him that the treaty concluded at Amsterdam gave priority both to giving protection to work people throughout the European Union, which I believe is consistent with any definition of a civilised society, and to the creation of jobs, which is primarily linked to competitiveness and getting British and other workers throughout Europe adapted to the skills that will be required to take on world markets.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Does the hon. Gentleman think that there is any connection between the fact that Britain has the lowest unemployment rate in Europe—

and falling—and the opt-out from the social chapter so successfully negotiated by the former Prime Minister and so casually thrown away by the Minister's party?

Mr. Henderson : No.

Mr. Davidson: Does my hon. Friend accept that one of the reasons why so many Conservative Members lost their jobs at the last general election was their opposition to Britain signing up to the employment chapter? There is no future for the European Community on the basis of low wages and poor conditions. I and many other Labour Members welcome the Government's commitment to ensuring that employment will in future be at the heart of what we do in Europe.

Mr. Henderson: There is a great temptation to agree with my hon. Friend, but Conservative Members, who sat on the Government Benches before the general election, were well on their way to redundancy long before that treaty was concluded.

Mr. Wilkinson: Are not the processes of ever-closer union via economic and monetary union inimical to job creation and sustainment? Do not Britain's large contributions to the European Union—in effect, more every year, especially to the cohesion fund and the structural fund—destroy jobs in this country by providing subsidies to competitor nations in the European Union? Should we not set our face against such job-destructive policies?

Mr. Henderson: There is a temptation among Conservative Members to believe that the big argument in economic policy is between Britain and the other European Union nations: the big argument is about how Britain and other EU countries can modify and change their economies and their employment practices to take on a challenge world wide. I do not believe that the conditions that were agreed in Amsterdam in any way detract from that important objective.

China

13. **Ms Corston:** If he will make a statement on Britain's relations with China. [12124]

Mr. Fatchett: We wish to establish a new, more constructive phase in our relationship with China, following the successful transfer of sovereignty in Hong Kong. When they met in New York in September, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and his Chinese opposite number agreed that we should aim to work together on a whole range of bilateral and global issues.

Ms Corston: Can my hon. Friend say how the Government intend to apply their welcome ethical foreign policy to China? Does he agree that, although we must be firm on human rights, the most effective way of improving human rights in China is to improve and strengthen all kinds of contact between our two countries, including economic ties?

Mr. Fatchett: We are keen to take the opportunity that has been presented by the successful handover of Hong Kong. We will engage with China on a range of issues. Trade and the commercial side will be part of that, but we shall never underestimate the importance of human rights in the dialogue between the United Kingdom and China. I am pleased to say to my hon. Friend that we are making progress in that respect. We have just had the first working-level meeting between our officials and Chinese officials on some of the issues. We can see good signs of progress. We hope to see that as part of the new relationship.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Has the hon. Gentleman given further thought to how we in the House can best monitor developments in Hong Kong?

Mr. Fatchett: The way in which we do that is, of course, a matter for the House, not for Foreign Office Ministers. We have a number of opportunities. The hon. Gentleman is successful at raising the question of Hong Kong whenever the opportunity arises. There are Question Times, there will be debates on Hong Kong and an annual report will be published by the Foreign Office on the work of the Joint Liaison Group; so there will be many opportunities in the House, as well as meetings of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. The House will have a continuing interest in Hong Kong. That is right, because Britain has a continuing responsibility under the Sino-British agreement.

Mr. Tipping: In his discussions with the Chinese Government, will the Minister look closely at claims that the Chinese are making about global warming? They are clear that they need to make pledges and commitments. It is important that there is growth in China, but at the same time will my hon. Friend closely examine China's environmental credentials?

Mr. Fatchett: It is pleasing to see that the Chinese Government are tackling the issue of global warming. It is important that the developed countries take a lead. We shall not make progress if the rich hide behind their affluence and put the responsibility for global warming on the developing countries. We need a relationship between the developed and developing countries, and China will play an important part in that.

European Court of Justice

14. **Mr. Swayne:** If he will make a statement about the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice regarding third pillar issues. [12125]

Mr. Doug Henderson: European Court of Justice jurisdiction in the third pillar is conferred on a case-by-case basis in respect of certain conventions. When the Amsterdam treaty comes into force, the ECJ's jurisdiction within the third pillar will be extended, but will remain limited. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. What is happening on the Front Bench below the Gangway?

Mr. Canavan: It is not us.

Madam Speaker: I did not recognise you, Dennis.

Mr. Canavan: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Swayne: May I refer the Minister to article F.2 of the European treaty on European Union and the decision taken at Amsterdam to amend article L of the Maastricht treaty, which makes article F.2 fully justiciable by the European Court of Justice? Was it really Her Majesty's Government's intention that criminal law passed in this House would be subject to the jurisdiction of unelected judges in Brussels?

Mr. Henderson: I know that the hon. Gentleman has spent a lot of time reading the Amsterdam treaty, but he has failed to understand that there are only limited extensions of the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. Asylum and immigration, on which Britain has a distinct policy on asylum and immigration—items which have been moved into pillar 1—are justiciable in other European Union countries. Pillar 3 contains minor adjustments to the previous position. The hon. Gentleman will know that, under the Maastricht treaty which the Conservatives signed when they were in government, the European Court of Justice has the capacity to become involved in the arbitration of conventions agreed under pillar 3.

EU Budget

15. **Mr. Evans:** What discussions about the increase in the United Kingdom contribution to the EU budget took place at the Amsterdam summit. [12127]

Mr. Doug Henderson: None.

Mr. Evans: Does the Minister think that we are getting value for money for the contribution that we make to the EU budget, which then finds its way into the salaries of Labour Members of the European Parliament? I say that because so many of them have shown themselves to be spineless and have turned themselves into political eunuchs by agreeing to be gagged and not to talk about any issue relating to the way in which they are elected to the European Parliament. Does the Minister agree that we should hold back some of the contribution to their salaries because they have agreed to be gagged?

Mr. Henderson: The House deserves a better question than that on an important issue. What I shall do for the hon. Gentleman is to answer the question that he should have asked, which was—

Madam Speaker: Order. That is rather too easy. The hon. Gentleman must answer the question asked.

Mr. Henderson: It would have been easy if the hon. Gentleman had addressed the issue that one of his hon. Friends addressed earlier on the budgetary issue, as he would have been given a sensible answer.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: The Minister will know that the second largest component of the EU budget is that of structural funds. He will recognise that there are areas of the United Kingdom, particularly in Wales and Scotland, where that is an important issue. We are moving towards the reform of structural funds and we are setting up a Welsh Assembly and a Scottish Parliament. Will the Minister bear it in mind that those bodies will be directly involved in the way in which regional funds are distributed in the next century?

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. Major structural reforms are necessary in the Union and will be tackled at the summit in Luxembourg; one such issue is that of the structural funds themselves. The rules that currently govern the dispersal of structural funds were drawn up seven or eight years ago when the shape of the European economy and the priorities for development were different from those that pertain today. An important issue that the summit must address is how we should consider what is happening in the European economy today and what change is necessary to the structural funds to ensure that those areas that need essential help receive it, regardless of the country in which they are located.

Mr. Nicholls: Does the Minister think that our ability to negotiate a fair contribution to the EU will be increased or decreased by our presence in the single currency?

Mr. Henderson: The United Kingdom's contribution has been decided in previous negotiations. I have already said in reply to a Conservative Member that such issues will be discussed at the summit in December, when a way forward will have to be decided on all such matters, including the future budget. One of the factors that I made clear at the weekend and which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made clear in countless negotiations with our European partners is that our abatement is not negotiable in the negotiations.

EU Common Foreign and Security Policy

17. **Mr. Rammell:** If he will make a statement on Britain's objectives in respect of common foreign and security policy matters during its presidency of the European Union. [12130]

Mr. Robin Cook: It will be our objective to demonstrate that, by working together, the countries of the European Union can carry greater influence to our mutual advantage. High priorities for the presidency will be maintaining robust pressure for fulfilment of the Dayton agreement on Bosnia and support for the resumption of progress in the middle east peace process. A major event in our presidency will be the Asia-Europe summit, which Britain will host and which will enable us to strengthen our trade links and our political dialogue with Asia.

Mr. Rammell: I thank the Secretary of State for that response. Will we seek to use the presidency to establish a European code of conduct on arms sales to ensure uniformity of policy across the European Union in line with our ethical foreign policy so that where we do not grant arms export licences, these are not taken up by other countries?

Mr. Cook: I am delighted to advise my hon. Friend that we have already begun such discussions. I was pleased that both the Prime Minister of France and the chair of its foreign relations committee have welcomed our new criteria on arms sales. We are in discussion with them on how we can turn those criteria into a common code of conduct, which would make sure that we compete against each other by raising commercial standards, not by lowering human rights standards.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government met in Edinburgh from 24 to 27 October—the first such meeting in Britain for 20 years. A Labour Government were in power the last time the meeting was held in this country and I am delighted that a Labour Government were able to welcome Commonwealth heads back to Britain. Fifty-one member states attended the meeting, 43 represented by heads of state or Prime Ministers—the largest ever gathering of Commonwealth heads. We also welcomed Fiji back to the Commonwealth.

I should like to thank the people of Scotland, and Edinburgh in particular, for the warm welcome that they gave my fellow Heads of Government and their delegations. I should also like to thank the police and everyone else involved in the organisation of the meeting for everything that they did to make the arrangements run so smoothly.

Her Majesty the Queen was able to address a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting for the first time. The warmth of the welcome that she was given was a tribute to the regard in which she is held by Commonwealth Governments all over the world.

Also for the first time, a Commonwealth business forum was held immediately before the Heads of Government meeting. It reflected the clear focus of the meeting on economic issues, in particular trade, investment and development. After an excellent debate, we were able to agree the Edinburgh Commonwealth economic declaration on "Promoting Shared Prosperity". That demonstrates the unique role that the Commonwealth can play in bringing together developed and developing countries in this area. The declaration—the first of its kind—sets out economic principles shared by the Commonwealth to match the political principles on good government and human rights set out in the Harare declaration of 1991.

The declaration marks real progress in four areas: first, agreement that the Commonwealth should be a force for freer trade in the world. In particular, we supported the expansion of duty-free market access for exports from the least developed countries, the need for adequate successor arrangements for African, Caribbean and Pacific banana exporters and a study of steps to increase trade between Commonwealth countries.

Secondly, we recognised the important role that the private sector has to play. We strongly supported the conclusions of the business forum and in particular the decision to establish a business council to facilitate contact between businesses across the Commonwealth. We also agreed on the benefits that international investment can bring and decided to finalise a code of good practice for Commonwealth Governments to encourage private investment.

I attended the launch of the new south Asia regional fund in the margins of the meeting. The fund should provide some US$200 million from the Commonwealth Development Corporation, countries of the region and others to promote investment in south Asia. The Government also intend that the Commonwealth Development Corporation should itself develop a new relationship with the private sector. That will give it increased funds for investment, and the proceeds from the sale of shares in the CDC will be ploughed straight back into the development programme.

Thirdly, we endorsed the target of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, and emphasised the importance of substantial and swift debt relief in achieving that. That built on the valuable work of the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the Mauritius Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meeting and the target of ensuring that every highly indebted poor country is launched on the process of debt reduction by the year 2000. The UK is willing to cancel aid debts of lower-income Commonwealth countries totalling £132 million provided they follow sensible economic policies. We have already made formal offers to seven countries with debts of £18 million and discussions have started with others.

Fourthly, the meeting sent a strong message to the Kyoto climate change conference in December that all countries, developed and developing, will need to play a role in achieving reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

In that context, I was able to announce that the Government will provide an additional £3 million for the Commonwealth's Iwokrama rain forest project in Guyana.

On the political side, Commonwealth heads reaffirmed their commitment to the Harare principles on good governance and human rights and agreed that any future Commonwealth members must meet the Harare criteria. We agreed that the Commonwealth ministerial action group set up at Millbrook in 1995 should continue to deal with serious and persistent violations of the Harare principles.

The meeting spent some time discussing our approach to the Nigerian regime. We unanimously agreed to continue the suspension of Nigeria. That excludes Nigeria from all Commonwealth activity.

The Commonwealth ministerial action group now has delegated power to invoke a number of specified measures, if the group decides that those would further the process of transition and respect for human rights in Nigeria. They include visa restrictions, withdrawal of military attachés, the cessation of military training, an embargo on the export of arms, the downgrading of diplomatic missions and cultural links and a ban on sporting contacts.

In addition, after 1 October 1998, the action group will assess whether Nigeria has satisfactorily completed its transition programme. If that assessment is negative, Heads of Government will consider Nigeria's expulsion from the Commonwealth and the introduction of further measures, such as a mandatory oil embargo.

I believe that those measures, taken together, send a clear and strong message to the Nigerian Government from all the members of the Commonwealth: if they do not improve substantially their respect for human rights and move back to democracy, they face severe sanctions.

Heads of Government strongly condemned the military coup in Sierra Leone and decided to continue the suspension of the military regime from Commonwealth meetings. We also called for the immediate reinstatement of President Kabbah, the legitimate head of state, whom I welcomed to the meeting as my special guest.

A final communiqué reflecting our discussions was issued at the end of our meeting yesterday morning. Copies of that and the economic declaration are available in the Library of the House.

In conclusion, I am pleased to report to the House that there was a remarkable degree of agreement at Edinburgh on both economic and political questions. Many heads said that it was the most harmonious Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting for many years.

I believe that the Commonwealth is needed now more than ever. It bridges the gap between developed and developing and provides a forum for co-operation and joint endeavour, and it can provide a strong moral lead in a world where basic human rights are too often under threat.

The meeting was also a success because the Commonwealth has a new focus on economic issues, it is showing the rest of the world the way on environmental problems such as climate change and it is setting an example in the field of human rights—our action on Nigeria makes it clear that the Commonwealth will not tolerate undemocratic behaviour and human rights abuses in its ranks.

At Edinburgh, my fellow Heads of Government and I began a process of change to prepare the Commonwealth to face the challenges of the 21st century and, in a striking testament to all that Nelson Mandela has done, with Commonwealth support, to transform his country, we agreed that the next Heads of Government meeting should be held in South Africa in 1999. There is no better place to ensure that a renewed Commonwealth is a force for good in the world.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement. On the Conservative Benches, we share his satisfaction that Scotland was host to the Commonwealth leaders and his pleasure that so many countries attended.

Does the Prime Minister agree that the constructive and friendly relationship that we now have with our friends in the Commonwealth is a tribute to decades of hard and difficult work? Is it not one more part of our heritage in which we can take pride? May I join the Prime Minister in his welcome for Fiji, his comments on Sierra Leone, and his tribute to Her Majesty the Queen?

I also welcome some of the conclusions of the summit. On the Conservative Benches, we hope that the Edinburgh economic declaration will act as a stimulus to greater and freer trade. We hope that the agreement that developed countries will work to produce a successful Kyoto conference will produce a cleaner world. To see whether those hopes will be turned into reality, will the Prime Minister tell us more of the detail of what was agreed in Edinburgh?

Although the Prime Minister has been described as relieved that the benefits of trade liberalisation were placed at the centre of the declaration, would it also be fair to describe him as disappointed not to win more explicit endorsement of a new round of world trade negotiations? While it is obviously right that steps should be taken to help smaller countries cope with the changes required by freer trade, does he share our conviction that we should support transitional but not protectionist measures?

May I also welcome the further progress made on debt and development at Edinburgh? Given Britain's history in playing a leading role in taking action to relieve debt burdens for the poorest countries, what new and further concrete steps do the Government propose to take? The Prime Minister has accepted some important and challenging statements on development aid. In particular, there is language about increased assistance from the international community. Should that be seen as an endorsement of the current spending plans on aid or as an intention to change them, or does the agreement instead mean a redistribution within our budget?

On the environment, the whole House will be pleased to see the commitment to success in Kyoto that has been so emphatically underlined, but when the declaration talks of significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, how significant are those meant to be? Will there be talk about hard figures or merely soft targets? What are the prospects of specific targets and a specific timetable? When there is talk of new resources to implement Agenda 21, how much might that involve and where will the resources come from?

What criteria will now be used to assess whether Nigeria has completed the programme for the restoration of democracy that has been demanded? Can the Prime Minister assure the House that he is satisfied with the mechanisms for enforcing sanctions and the plans for tougher sanctions later, should they be needed?

On future membership of the Commonwealth, will the Prime Minister confirm that the criteria applied to the membership applications from the Palestine National Authority, Yemen and Rwanda will be the same as those used in considering the position of other middle eastern states, including Israel?

I pay tribute to the huge number of people who worked hard to make the Commonwealth leaders so welcome in Edinburgh. Can the Prime Minister confirm reports in this morning's press, however, that delegations were angry about the allegedly patronising and arrogant attitude of a small number of his officials? Is it true that his press secretary gave briefings on talks believed by others to be confidential, and unilaterally and erroneously announced that the leaders had rejected the new applicants for membership, forcing the Secretary-General to clarify the position?

Finally, I congratulate the Prime Minister on his new role as a film producer. It is touching that he took so much trouble to make a film celebrating our world-class industries, entrepreneurial economy, consumer choice and flexible labour markets, all of which were created by Conservative Governments.

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Gentleman forgets that on 1 May the Conservative Government were rather overwhelmingly rejected. As a matter of fact, the film shows what a good job the people of Britain are doing.

As for the right hon. Gentleman's stuff about arrogant officials and press briefings, I think that the problem was the press secretary's golf, rather than any briefing. Those reports this morning were complete and utter nonsense. Everybody spoke of what a successful and harmonious Heads of Government meeting there had been. There was a tremendous fund of good will towards this country and the Commonwealth in general. We should brush off such press stories with the contempt that they deserve.

I shall deal with the right hon. Gentleman's serious points about the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. In respect of freer trade, the most important

[The Prime Minister]

outcomes were the statement of clear principle that we want to move towards freer trade, and the fact that the liberalisation process was clearly supported. Of course we would have preferred to go further, as would many of the developed countries. That is true, but all the countries accepted that it was a question not of whether we move towards more free trade, but of how we manage that process. That was a significant step forward. In respect of protectionism, I entirely agree; the last thing that we want is protectionism in any shape or form.

The right hon. Gentleman asked what specific steps we would take with regard to debt and development. First, as I pointed out, the Mauritius mandate that was negotiated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer took us a considerable way forward in giving debt relief to poorer countries. Secondly, the changes in the Commonwealth Development Corporation will help to bring more private investment, and therefore greater development, to some of the poorest countries in the world. Those were two significant steps forward.

With respect to the Kyoto targets, the right hon. Gentleman will know that the European Union has specific targets, of which Britain is a part and a strong supporter. The answer is that we want to get targets and timetables that are as good as possible. It was not the role of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting to come to a declared view on specific percentages and timetables, but the important factor is that, for the first time, it was accepted that all countries, including the developing countries, have a role to play and an obligation to play a role in that process.

In respect of Nigeria, the right hon. Gentleman asked what would be the indications that Nigeria was moving from its present position. Obviously, elections would be the first and most important indication, and the second would be the release of political prisoners. Both must be undertaken. Contrary to some reports, a very strong series of sanctions is now in the hands of the Commonwealth ministerial action group, which can be used if proper progress is not being made. That was unanimously agreed by the Heads of Government meeting. Those tough sanctions, as I outlined in my statement, will give us an important lever to try to bring about greater democracy in Nigeria.

The right hon. Gentleman raised the question of new members. The same criteria will apply to all new members. He specifically raised the issue of Israel. No formal application has been made by Israel, but should such an application be made, the same criteria will be applied as to every other country.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I welcome the Prime Minister's statement, and in particular the complimentary remarks that he made about Edinburgh and Scotland.

What the Prime Minister has told us about debt relief will be extremely encouraging to some of the poorest countries in the world. However, I confess some disappointment over the failure of the Commonwealth Heads of Government to take more decisive action in relation to Nigeria.

In his statement, the Prime Minister told us that any country applying for membership must meet the principles of the Harare declaration. If Nigeria was not a member and was applying for membership, it could not be admitted because it is in breach of those very principles.

The truth is that there has been no improvement in Nigeria since its suspension. The same regime is in place and the same breaches of human rights are part and parcel of the way in which that regime purports to govern the people of Nigeria. What justification is there for a country that so blatantly, obviously and defiantly flouts the values of the Commonwealth to continue to retain membership of an organisation that exists for the promotion of human rights, if it exists for anything? Is there not a risk that the harmonious atmosphere to which the Prime Minister has rightly drawn our attention may be achieved at the expense of decisive action?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not accept that, for the simple reason that Nigeria is suspended from the Commonwealth and is excluded from all Commonwealth activity at present. The Heads of Government meeting in New Zealand a couple of years ago delegated power to the Commonwealth ministerial action group to come up with a series of recommendations, which we have now accepted and endorsed. They will include expulsion if Nigeria does not change. The list of sanctions is very strong. As I said at the press conference at the conclusion of the Heads of Government meeting yesterday, all those who want to see change in Nigeria should come together and get behind the recommendations of the ministerial action group. Those recommendations are strong and right, and they will lead to the expulsion of Nigeria if it does not change.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Is it not right to recall that during the South Africa crisis a decade ago, many establishment figures in this country were writing off the Commonwealth as irrelevant? Happily, a more relevant and dynamic Commonwealth has emerged from the Edinburgh CHOGM. However, does not the issue of Nigeria—to which the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) referred—strain the credibility of the Commonwealth as a human rights organisation and the Harare declaration? My right hon. Friend said that a "clear and strong message" had been sent to Nigeria. A clear and strong message was sent last time. My right hon. Friend's colleagues must surely realise the damage that has been done to the human rights credibility of the organisation by the failure to take decisive action now.

The Prime Minister: I simply do not accept that we have not taken clear and tough action, which includes a series of sanctions that are extremely strong. They could lead not merely to the expulsion of Nigeria from the Commonwealth, but to a mandatory oil embargo, visa restrictions, a military arms embargo and the cessation of cultural and sporting links. Those measures would have a very important and serious effect.

At Auckland two years ago, we agreed to delegate to the ministerial action group the task of monitoring what was happening in Nigeria and then producing a series of recommendations. It has done that and, to my mind, the most important thing now is to carry through that process. The deadline is 1 October 1998 and, if there has not been substantial progress by then, the sanctions will follow. There is no doubt about that. That is the best and the proper way to proceed.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): It would be churlish not to express appreciation of Her Majesty's Government's recognition of the economic potential of the Commonwealth—not least in view of the fact that this country conducts a higher proportion of trade outside the European Union than with any other big countries within the Union. Britain also has a larger proportion of trade with the Asian region, where there are many Commonwealth countries. As the European Union takes a leading role in Britain's trade policy, how can the Prime Minister ensure that important reforms—such as safeguarding the banana regime that is so crucial to Caribbean producer countries within the Commonwealth—remain?

The Prime Minister: That is precisely why we mentioned the position of the banana producers particularly in the communiqué and in our discussions. Britain can play a role as a bridge between the Commonwealth countries and the European Union. We can make clear to our European partners the importance of not having a fortress Europe and of taking account of the problems faced in other parts of the world.

Another thing that we can do—we shall stress this point very much in the coming months, particularly when we have presidency of the European Union—is emphasise the need for fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May we welcome the timely £3 million help that has been given to the vulnerable and fragile Guyana rain forest?

What reflections does the Prime Minister have on President Mandela's comments about Lockerbie? Is having a trial in Scotland really more important than having any trial at all? In the light of the decision to discuss Bosnia in The Hague, is it, after nine long years, really impossible to send the Lockerbie issue to The Hague?

The Prime Minister: I welcome what my hon. Friend said about the additional resources for the Iwokrama rain forest project.

As for Lockerbie and the position of the Libyan suspects, there is nothing that I can add to what I said yesterday and what I understand the Foreign Secretary said at Question Time today. Everyone wants these people brought to trial, but it is important that nothing is done which undermines the perception and the fact of the integrity of the Scottish judicial process. That will be felt very strongly by people in Scotland.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Will the Prime Minister spell out exactly what the Government are going to do to support the Commonwealth agreement to support the Caribbean countries that are banana producers? In addition to working with his European partners, will he consult his friend President Clinton in the United States of America, who accepted a large donation to his re-election fund from a large banana producer and trader in the United States? Could not the Prime Minister combine his friendships with Europe and the United States to help the Caribbean producers?

The Prime Minister: Fortunately, I am not responsible for anyone else's campaign donation funds. We are supporting the banana producers in the World Trade Organisation and other forums, which allows us to take account of their case. Everyone understands the problems of those countries as economies that are completely dependent on one particular form of produce. From the bilateral discussions that I had with people in the Caribbean states and, indeed, from Africa, I think that they are well aware of the support that Britain is giving them. The best support that we can give is to use our influence in the international forums where we are represented to take account of their case.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): I congratulate the Prime Minister on the great skill shown at Edinburgh at the weekend, including that shown in striking the difficult balance on the issue of Nigeria. However, I should like to press him on the two applicants that have been mentioned and which were rejected—Yemen and the Palestine National Authority. It was reported that Yemen, including Aden with which we of course have great historical connections, was rejected because of its perceived lack of democracy and some questions about its economy. However, there are already, of course, not a few members of the Commonwealth whose democratic systems are not all that far from that of Yemen and whose economies are not that far from that of Yemen, which is a sleeping giant of a country—it has enormous oil reserves and a great future.

Apparently, the Palestine National Authority was rejected because it is not yet a state. I understand that point, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) has argued, could not the peace process in the middle east be assisted by a show of hospitality and welcome from the Commonwealth to the emerging Palestinian state based around the Palestine National Authority?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for what he said about the meeting in general. As for the applications for membership made by Yemen, Rwanda and the Palestine National Authority, we did not reject them but said that we would keep them under review in accordance with the criteria that we then established at the Heads of Government meeting. We shall carry on doing that. They are not ruled out altogether; indeed, we specifically welcomed the interest expressed by the Palestine National Authority. However, there is no state there as such, and it is important that we apply the criteria—criteria to which we have held and which have been codified and accepted over time by the Commonwealth Heads of Government—entirely fairly and objectively to any state that makes an application to us. We shall do that. Applications are kept under review, and I think that each of the two countries—Yemen and Rwanda—and the Palestine National Authority understand very well that they are not shut out from consideration and that their applications will remain under review and be determined in accordance with the criteria that we have established.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I join others in thanking the Prime Minister for his kind remarks about the hospitality offered by the citizens of Edinburgh and of Scotland in general. No doubt he will have noted that during the past 30 years, 50 countries in the Commonwealth have achieved full independence—perhaps Scotland will be next on the list.

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

On the issue of the cancellation of aid debt, will the Prime Minister expand on what he means by the pursuit of sensible economic policies? What criteria will be exercised and who will monitor the exercising of those criteria?

The Prime Minister: The short answer is that we need to make sure that the relief—and therefore, effectively, the aid money—that we are giving those countries will be properly used and that economic policies will be pursued to make best use of it. That will be done in respect of each country individually. It is important to know that whatever help we give will be properly used. It must be properly directed, not wasted, and should form part of a programme to put the economy of the country back on its feet.

The strong message came out from the contributions of all the poorer countries that they resent being dependent on aid. They want to escape from that situation and believe it to be in their best interests to do so. We must ensure that, by a combination of trade, investment and aid, we allow those countries to reach a position of self-sufficiency and independence. Many of them are enormously rich in natural resources, but a large part of the public spending of many of those countries is eaten up by debt repayment—often just the repayment of interest, without ever touching the debt capital.

A combination of measures is required. We must ensure that any relief that we give is properly directed, but we are doing that in consultation with those countries.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is very important that there should be no attempt to develop an organisation such as the Commonwealth, which is based on consensus, into an alternative United Nations? It needs to work on the basis of its networks. May I draw to my right hon. Friend's attention the report produced in the previous Parliament by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, which criticised the admission of Cameroon to the Commonwealth without specific democratic guarantees? Will he give us an assurance that any future new members will be required to meet the democratic criteria laid down in the Harare declaration?

The Prime Minister: What my hon. Friend says is correct. At the margins of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), met the Prime Minister of Cameroon and made our concerns clear. It is important to hold firm to the principles set out in the Harare declaration. There may be difficult judgments to make in certain cases, but those principles are clear and right and should be adhered to. The Commonwealth ministerial action group report dealt not just with the situation in Nigeria, but with the situation in Gambia and Sierra Leone.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): While I share the concern expressed on both sides of the House and elsewhere about the situation in Nigeria, does the Prime Minister accept that it is important that the United Kingdom Government, the Commonwealth and other international forums should be even handed when dealing with such countries? The democratic structures and human rights records of several Commonwealth countries leave a great deal to be desired, let alone those of the People's Republic of China. Many countries, not least the United States, are prepared to extend tremendous hospitality and welcome to the leaders of that country. Is it not important that we do not isolate Nigeria and that there is on-going dialogue? It is a huge and important country in Africa.

The Prime Minister: In one sense, what the hon. Gentleman says is right. We want Nigeria back in the Commonwealth, but there has to be a response from Nigeria. The Nigerian Government must obey at least the minimum requirements of the democratic rights and processes set out in the Harare declaration. As a military regime, and with the number of political prisoners that they have, they plainly do not qualify. Dialogue is fine, but they need to know where they stand. They now know where they stand. If they do not make substantial progress towards restoring a proper democratic regime, releasing political prisoners and obeying minimum human rights standards, they will face sanctions. Of course, everyone acknowledges that Nigeria has a large population and is rich in resources. We want it back in the Commonwealth, but the price of being in the Commonwealth is adherence to its principles.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): When human rights and human rights abuses were discussed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, what consideration was given to the routine harassment of Opposition forces and politicians in Kenya?

Was any pressure put on the Australian Government concerning their proposed amendment to the Native Title Act 1993, which would substantially remove Aboriginal land rights and would put the cause of Aboriginal people back decades if it was passed by the Australian Parliament? The amendment also contravenes United Nations declarations and other declarations concerning the rights of indigenous peoples.

The Prime Minister: I have no comment to make on the situation in Australia.

In respect of Kenya, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met a delegation from Kenya during the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting and made clear to them our concerns. We have repeatedly condemned the excessive violence used by the Kenyan police and we have repeatedly raised the problems of human rights there. It is an issue which we raise frequently, certainly on a bilateral basis.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): In matters relating to the Commonwealth, has it now become the Government's policy not to act without the consent or consensus of the other Commonwealth countries? In contradistinction to what my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) said, given the serious nature of the violations of human rights in Nigeria, given the length of time for which they have been going on and given the Government's proud proclamation of their ethical standards in their foreign and Commonwealth policies, should not this country take a lead and give an example by introducing the severest sanctions on the Nigerian Government, which might help to concentrate their mind?

The Prime Minister: Without repeating what I have already said about Nigeria a number of times, I make the point that it is simply wrong to say that the action that is being proposed by the ministerial action group is not tough. Indeed, Britain played the leading part in putting the programme together. The measures that will follow do not merely include expulsion. Nigeria is now suspended from the Commonwealth; it is suspended from all Commonwealth activity. To all intents and purposes, vis-à-vis Nigeria and the Commonwealth, Nigeria is out of the Commonwealth. The measures that we have proposed in addition, which I listed earlier, are in a sense of greater force in relation to the Nigerian regime.

We are taking action and we have played a significant part in the action taken by the European Union. We shall carry on, whether in the Commonwealth or elsewhere, making our position clear in respect of Nigeria and in respect of any other country whose human rights record we believe falls short of what it needs to be.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): In sharp contrast to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), I welcome the Prime Minister's unequivocal statement that the trial of those deemed responsible for the murders at Lockerbie will be held at the High Court in Edinburgh. I also welcome the invitations issued to representatives of Arab and African countries to visit Edinburgh to examine for themselves the fairness and transparency of our legal system. Would it not be a good idea for the Lord Advocate to suggest to the Libyan authorities that a small team of Libyan lawyers would be welcome to take part as advisers to those defending the accused at any such trial?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that anyone can doubt the validity of Scottish justice and the strength of the Scottish judicial system. It is highly respected everywhere in the world and nobody has ever been able to produce evidence to cast any doubt on its independence or impartiality. The question of who may advise the people from Libya if they are brought to trial in Scotland is a matter which will be considered in accordance with the normal processes of Scottish law. As my hon. Friend rightly says, there can be no doubt about the impartiality of the Scottish judicial process. That is absolutely clear and that is what I have said.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): May I press the Prime Minister on a question that was asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague)? I welcome the declaration by the Commonwealth countries in respect of the reduction of CO_2 and other greenhouse gases being a potentially significant environmental improvement. Is that merely an aspiration by the Commonwealth countries, or did that declaration envisage any fixed targets?

The Prime Minister: There are not, and it would not be appropriate if there were, because the Commonwealth will not be negotiating at the Kyoto conference. The Commonwealth was setting out its belief as a matter of principle, that all countries—including developing countries—have a role and the obligation to play a role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. My own view is that that is a tremendous help in the run-up to the Kyoto conference.

One of the big problems is that some industrialised countries will say, "Why should we reduce greenhouse gas emissions?" if the developing world and some of the countries that are or will become big producers of greenhouse gas emissions have no reciprocal obligations or at least an agreement to a process involving the developing countries. The importance of that part of the communiqué which we agreed at Edinburgh is that we can say in principle that Commonwealth countries will play their part in the process. Therefore, strategies such as the joint implementation strategy, where there is some recognition by developing countries that they have to play a part in the process and use more environmentally beneficial forms of energy, give us a foothold in achieving those aims. That is more important than setting targets.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I noticed that the Prime Minister clarified some of the latest press announcements. I welcome the fact that some of the earlier ones were equally fallacious, as Scotland would not have been Scotland without the skirl of the pipes. Having said that, let me welcome the statement about debt accommodation and press the Prime Minister especially on inward investment to those countries. Will there be any restrictions on raising interest levels over the years, as that is one of the penalties that have been imposed on many developing countries in the past? On the other side of the equation, is there any limitation on the growth of the Commonwealth? Apart from human rights issues, is it not also necessary to keep something of a family tie, or will it simply be an amorphous body competing with other bodies?

The Prime Minister: There was a strong declaration in favour of encouraging inward investment and for developed countries to do everything they could to assist it. It is important to recognise that the developing countries themselves must welcome that inward investment, and the terms upon which it is made are obviously extremely important.

One of the best aspects of the economic declaration was—for the first time—the welcome in principle by Commonwealth countries for more private sector investment in their economies. That is a big move forward, which we should welcome. Of course, the south Asia regional fund—the $200 million facility for encouraging greater inward investment in south Asia—is an example of the type of practical arrangement that we can put together on the back of that general principle.

It is immensely important that we keep the concept of the family of Commonwealth nations. Many other things happened during the conference. For example, children from each of the Commonwealth countries spent a week together. In a sense, they were symbols of the fact that the Commonwealth is and must be more than a trade and investment gathering; it is also a body of nations with a strong common heritage, a common language, shared values and—if we use the next period of time imaginatively—the possibility to be a bridge between the developed and developing countries.

One of the good things about the Commonwealth meeting last weekend was that, partly because we have got over all the problems in South Africa, which meant

[The Prime Minister]

that sanctions were the only issue that was talked about, Britain is now in a position to play a far more constructive role in the Commonwealth.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): Bearing in mind the Prime Minister's condemnation of human rights abuses in Nigeria, will he give an assurance that there will be no more deportations to Nigeria of people who currently reside in this country?

The Prime Minister: That is a matter for the courts and for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to decide in accordance with the normal rules. Those rules will be applied properly.

BILLS PRESENTED

BANK OF ENGLAND

Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Secretary Margaret Beckett, Mr. Alistair Darling, Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Geoffrey Robinson and Mrs. Helen Liddell, presented a Bill to make provision about the constitution, regulation, financial arrangements and functions of the Bank of England, including provision for the transfer of supervisory functions; to amend the Banking Act 1987 in relation to the provision and disclosure of information; to make provision relating to appointments to the governing body of a designated agency under the Financial Services Act 1986; to amend Schedule 5 to that Act; to make provision relating to the registration of Government stocks and bonds; to make provision about the application of section 207 of the Companies Act 1989 to bearer securities; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 62].

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY (REFERENDUM)

Mr. Secretary Prescott, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Nick Raynsford and Ms Glenda Jackson, presented a Bill to make provision for the holding of a referendum on the establishment of a Greater London Authority and for expenditure on preparation for such an Authority; and to confer additional functions on the Local Government Commission for England in connection with the establishment of such an Authority: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 61].

Higher Education (Scotland)

4.14 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You may be aware from this morning's press of an incomprehensible decision to fund the fourth year of higher education in Scotland only for Scots and for non-British European Union nationals. That means that British taxpayers' money would be used to subsidise French, Italian or Greek students attending university in Scotland, but not those from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Has either the Secretary of State for Scotland or the Secretary of State for Education and Employment attempted to make a statement on the issue, which involves repellant bigotry, appalling politics and dubious legality?

Madam Speaker: I have not been told that any statement of that nature is to be made. Hon. Members of course keep an eye on the annunciator. Statements are always announced well in advance—well before lunchtime—so that we are aware of anything that might be taking place.

Prevention of Delay in Trials

4.15 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide that a person indicted for a serious criminal offence shall be brought to trial within a period of not more than 110 days; and for connected purposes.

The Government say that they are committed to speeding up the justice process, bringing people to trial sooner. They have suggested that they want to halve the time that it takes for youth offenders to be brought to trial. I believe that the introduction of a statutory time limit would help, in particular, to ease the overcrowding in prisons and prevent people from being allowed out on bail. Such a time limit would also comply with the Government's promise to bring young offenders before the courts earlier and prevent them from reoffending while awaiting trial.

Such a provision could usefully be introduced into English law to expedite the process of youth justice. Will the Government consider incorporating into English law the 110-day rule, which is highly regarded as one of the cornerstones of the criminal procedure and justice system in Scotland, and which recognises protection for the accused by providing that he may not be detained for a total period of more than 110 days?

Under common law, there is no time limit for commencing an action brought by the Crown. A prosecution may therefore be commenced at any time after the alleged offence. The prerogative writ of habeas corpus, which is enshrined in the Habeas Corpus Acts 1679 and 1816, is a means of securing the release of a person unlawfully detained, but it is a prerogative writ and not a statutory requirement.

The Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 provides for a regime of statutory time limits for the prosecution of criminal cases, but it has yet to be implemented. As there are no mandatory time limits set for the detention of prisoners on remand in England and Wales, the length of imprisonment does not constitute unlawful detention. At any given time, 20 per cent. of the prison population are prisoners on remand. At the end of August, 12,000 prisoners were on remand in England and Wales.

Under Scots law, the 110-day rule prevents people from being detained without trial for more than 110 days. After that period, they must be released. The introduction of a time limit for detention on remand in England and Wales would help to speed up the operation of the judicial system and would avoid people being detained in custody indefinitely. Allowing trials to be brought at an early date would assist witnesses in presenting their evidence before diminishing memory weakened the case against the accused. The Bill would assist both the defence and the prosecution in any trial.

The new legislation is needed to protect the civil liberties of those detained by the police. If the Government are serious about legal reform—as they claim to be—and earnest in their desire to modernise the English legal system, they should consider introducing the 110-day rule in England to improve the rapid delivery of justice and to protect the rights of the accused.

The 110-day rule exists under Scots law and could usefully be applied in England. The rule simply states that if a person is taken into custody, his trial must commence within 110 days. If it does not, that person must be released. As a Scottish advocate, I can vouch for the benefits of such a system. The reform would avoid the problem of people languishing in custody indefinitely, which is unacceptable when people are later acquitted at trial. We have a duty in England and Wales to process people's cases as quickly as we can. Going to court can be the most stressful and disruptive occasion in many people's lives and to keep them waiting in custody, without a definite 110-day limit, is unacceptable both to the prosecution and defence.

Allowing trials to be brought at an early date assists witnesses in presenting their evidence. While I concede that exceptions will have to be made to the rule, especially if the defence has not had time to prepare its case, we should offer a minimum guarantee to protect people's civil liberties. The 110-day rule is seen as a peculiarly Scottish concept, but it is a vital safeguard which protects the civil liberties of those detained by the state.

How does the rule work? If the trial has not started by the time the accused has spent 110 days in custody, he must be liberated forthwith unless the period is extended. A trial starts when a jury is sworn to try the accused. Once an accused person is liberated under the provision, he cannot be pursued for that offence and he shall be for ever free from all question of process for it. An extension of the 110-day rule may be granted by a single judge of the High Court if the delay in beginning the trial is due to the illness of the accused or a judge, the absence or illness of any necessary witness, or a sufficient cause not attributable to any fault on the part of the prosecutor. The defence or the Crown may appeal against the granting or refusal of the extension to the Court of Appeal.

There is sufficient evidence for the Government to be interested in applying the rule in England. Today, I obtained copies of two consultation papers from the Library. The first dealt with reducing remand delays. The Government remind us of their manifesto commitment to reduce remand delays to national targets, but it has taken longer for cases to be completed in recent years, despite significant reductions in the number of cases coming to the criminal courts. In far too many custody cases, statutory custody time limits are not being met, and urgent changes are needed to improve current performance. I remind all those who are interested in the subject that we have until 14 November to submit responses to the consultation paper.

In a third consultation paper, which sets out the Government's proposals for reforming the youth justice scheme and tackling delays, the Government remind us that one of their top priorities is faster, more efficient youth offender proceedings. They specify that a key target—indeed, one of the Government's five election pledges—is to halve the time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders.

We are told that it is currently taking an unacceptable average of four and a half months for a young person who commits an offence to be sentenced. In the worst cases, the offenders are not dealt with until a year or more after the offence is committed. Such delays anger and distress the victims and do not help the young offender, as the link between the offence and society's response to it is broken. The new system would enable the youth justice system to operate more effectively.

[Miss Anne McIntosh]

On the question of people being allowed out on bail, I remind the House that in the tragic case in which the woman police officer was murdered at the weekend, the accused had been released on bail. That is another argument for the Government adopting the measure. I think that I have given sufficient reasons for the 110-day rule to be introduced into English and Welsh law. I urge the Government to support my proposal.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Miss Anne McIntosh, Mrs. Eleanor Laing, Mr. Keith Simpson, Mr. James Gray, Mr. David Prior, Mr. Andrew Tyrie, Mr. Christopher Fraser, Mr. Robert Walter, Mr. Tim Collins, Mr. Desmond Swayne, Mrs. Theresa May and Mr. Nick St. Aubyn.

PREVENTION OF DELAY IN TRIALS

Miss Anne McIntosh accordingly presented a Bill to provide that a person indicted for a serious criminal offence shall be brought to trial within a period of not more than 110 days; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 28 November, and to be printed [Bill 65].

Defence Policy

[Relevant documents: Minutes of Evidence taken before the Defence Committee on 29th July (Gulf War Illnesses), HC 222-i, and 30th July (Strategic Defence Review), HC 138-i, and the First Special Report from the Defence Committee (Government Replies to First to Sixth Reports of Session 1996–97: HC 94 (Sale of the Married Quarters Estate), HC 211 (The Army Terms of Service (Amendment) Regulations (S.I., 1996, No. 2973)), HC 142 (Defence Medical Services), HC 127 (Defence Spending), HC 233 (Heavy Lift) and HC 158 (Gulf War Illnesses: Latest Developments)), HC 153.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Madam Speaker: I inform the House that, because of the great number of right hon. and hon. Members seeking to take part in the debate, I must restrict Back-Bench speeches to 10 minutes.

4.26 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Dr. John Reid): I approach this speech with a mixture of pride and humility: pride not in myself, but in the accomplishments, professionalism and sheer dedication of the British armed forces, which I have been temporarily asked to represent in this Chamber; and a sense of humility when confronted with both the admiration that they enjoy world wide and the daunting nature of the tasks that lie ahead.

At the same time, I am clear that those of us who have the privilege of being appointed to the Ministry of Defence realise that it brings with it no mundane or simple challenge, for this Department is charged with providing the fighting power to discharge one of the primary tasks of Government—the protection of our fellow citizens, our country, our freedoms, our dependent territories and our wider interests in the world.

Under this Government, the Department is charged with a second task, for, as the Prime Minister has made clear, the Government believe in taking an active part in international affairs. We accept that just as the citizen at home has responsibilities as well as rights, so, too, in the international arena we as a nation have an obligation to contribute towards making the world a better, safer and more secure place. This is not just because of our international standing in the UN, NATO, the European Union and the Commonwealth—though that would surely be enough in itself—and not just because of the self-evident self-interest of a more secure world, but because if there is to be an ethical dimension to our foreign policy, it will surely require positive action in resisting aggression, protecting civilians, seeking to prevent genocide, terrorism and enforced starvation, assisting evacuees and tackling the world wide scourge of the drugs trade. That will encompass peacekeeping and peacemaking, and the many other tasks in which our armed forces are a primary or important instrument of action.

Those tasks would be challenging enough in normal times. However, we live not in normal times but in an epoch of rapid, profound international change. A mere decade ago, the cold war presented grave dangers, but the two great glaciers held in check in their hinterland a multitude of potential problems, frozen in relative stability.

A torrent of new risks has been unleashed, in the form of border disputes, ethnic enmities, civil wars, arms proliferation, mass illegal migrations and international criminal opportunities. The relative simplicity of the old threat has gone, and with it, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the comfortable certainties that marked yesterday's security strategy.

I was struck last night by the large number of hon. Members—some long standing and distinguished, and others relatively new—who wanted to speak in this first defence debate of the new Parliament; it is a reflection of the abiding interest of the House in the defence of our country.

I regret that I was unable to deal with all the myriad points made by hon. Members. I will, however, touch on the substantial points raised by the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), a distinguished former Secretary of State for Defence, whom shortage of time, rather than discourtesy, prevented me from answering.

Our strategic defence review—which, I reiterate, is policy led, rather than resource driven—will ensure that we have clarity in our objectives and coherence in our planning as we move into the 21st century. Resources obviously matter and, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said yesterday, we are determined, as part of the review, to undertake a ruthless search for greater efficiency in defence spending within the present budget, to create the space to redeploy towards perceived inadequacies and any newly identified roles, capabilities, missions and tasks. We want not only to deliver value for money but to ensure that Britain has flexible, high-capability forces, able to meet tomorrow's challenges.

As far as possible, we want to build consensus. That does not mean quiescence, or a lack of criticism or vigour in debate. There will be disagreements—we, like all other Governments, will make mistakes and we fully accept that it is the duty of the Opposition to point them out, preferably before they are made—but we believe that the grounds exist, as the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said last night, for all of us to work together to build a framework for the future, putting national security and the national interest above party politics.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Those are fine words, but where is the foreign policy base line for us to discuss? It would be easy to achieve consensus if there were a Green or White Paper on the foreign policy base line for the strategic defence review, but, as there is not, we have to conclude that the base line will appear in a final document after the Treasury axe has fallen, and it will be a reverse justification.

Dr. Reid: That relates to another point made last night by the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife. This debate will contribute to the formulation of ideas, so we would not want to prejudge it. More importantly, I commend to the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) the speeches of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to the Royal United Services Institute and the English Speaking Union and his articles in a number of publications. The hon. Gentleman will find in them a range of assumptions which address high-intensity and low-intensity warfare, peacekeeping, geographical dispersion of threats, risks, capabilities, sustainability, and concurrency of operations. There is no shortage of views put out by my right hon. Friend to inform the debate. In addition, we have of course had seminars and submissions. We have had as much open discussion as possible. We have put the emerging thinking into the public domain, but we genuinely wish the House to contribute to that thinking.

I listened with interest to the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife last night because almost every issue that he mentioned has a resonance with the issues raised by my right hon. Friend, with the exception of the merging of the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence, which I believe has not been done anywhere else in the world.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): It seems to command some support among former Foreign Secretaries. On the substantive point, there are issues about, for example, the extent to which the United Kingdom's defence should be integrated with Europe or whether the primacy of NATO should be maintained in all circumstances. Those are political judgments. The Minister knows my view. I believe that there should be much more integration of British and European defence. So far, we are not sure what the Government's view is.

Dr. Reid: In that case, I commend to the hon. and learned Gentleman that elementary document, the Labour party manifesto, which was endorsed by 95 per cent. of Labour party members and, overwhelmingly, by the people. NATO is the cornerstone of our defence. Yes, we wish to develop the European security and defence identity, but within the framework of NATO. That is not a matter for discussion in the defence review. The other matter that was written into our manifesto was the retention of the minimum deterrent through Trident. We have made our views plain on that issue, as on all the other issues that have been mentioned.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): May I press the Minister a little further on the foreign policy base line? May we assume that in the strategic defence review, the three primary roles of the armed forces—the defence of the realm and its dependent territories, defence against an external aggressor, and full ability to take part in recognised international defensive and offensive forums such as NATO—will be fully maintained and that our ability in those respects will not be significantly reduced?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman may take it that those three roles are encompassed by the aims of the review, but if it was as simple as wrapping the matter up in those three roles despite the changing world and our changing commitments, we would not need a defence review or debate; we would merely write down the roles. We are not going to abandon the defence of Britain. We are committed to NATO and to common protection and security. I have already made it plain that we are committed to the defence of our dependent territories and, of course, to discharging our international obligations to the world. I say yes to the three roles, but the matter is slightly more complex, as the hon. Gentleman knows.

If we are to make a rigorous analysis, we must begin by analysing the base from which we start. I believe that we do not start from a very firm base in all areas. Thinking back to the discussion last night, it is not only that defence expenditure has been cut by 29 per cent. since the mid-1980s or that personnel numbers have been

[Dr. Reid]

cut by 32 per cent. or that tanks, frigates, destroyers and the surface fleet have been cut. It is that we believe that the manner in which those cuts were made was too arbitrary.

The arbitrary nature of the reductions and the apparent lack of coherence has left us with a sorry legacy—an inheritance which is now manifesting itself in a number of inadequacies. I want to mention only three as examples. This need not be a point of party political contention. I do not suggest that the previous Government intentionally designed the inadequacies, but, before we start to deploy resources, we have to backfill the inadequacies to meet our most basic tasks. The first is the inadequacy of strategy. Clear direction must be given so that everyone involved, including service men and women, who ultimately have to bear the task that we place on their shoulders, knows the direction in which we are moving.

Secondly, mention was made last night of the parlous state of the defence medical services. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that it is now obvious that the defence medical services are in a sorry mess, and that those Members will support me when I say that I have instructed that an urgent reassessment take place, and that proposals for action be formulated without waiting the five years suggested by the Defence Select Committee.

The third example will be recognised by hon. Members throughout the House. There are chronic inadequacies in personnel numbers. Published figures showed a shortfall of more than 5,000 men in the Army alone when the new Government took office. Whatever their intent, the previous Government's redundancy programme, the implementation of which I fully accept was complex, has created a serious shortfall. We aim to redress that as one of our major priorities.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): I seek clarification. Is the Minister saying that the previous Government cut too much, cut too little, or got it just right?

Dr. Reid: If we are running 5,000 men short or, on projected figures for next year, possibly a great deal more than that, no one can suggest that the previous Government got it just right, whatever their intent. They got it badly wrong. However, it is not a simple matter of replacing soldiers made redundant with new soldiers. The matter is not open to simple solutions. It involves a range of problems not only of numbers but of culture, retention, the nature of the modern armed forces and the nature of the community from which they draw their raw material. I do not suggest that the previous Government simply should not have handed out redundancy notices, but, whatever their intent, they got it badly wrong. All of us will now wish to put it right.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): While I accepted the reprimand given to me yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State when I raised the case of Major Eric Joyce, may I say to my hon. Friend that the recent highly publicised cases of bullying and sexual discrimination against young recruits will act as a severe deterrent to the recruitment of young men and women to our forces? I remind him as a Scots Member of Parliament that there have been two cases of bullying of young Scots recruits in infantry regiments. I suspect that those cases will act as a severe deterrent not only to young men and women but to their parents. My hon. Friend will have to do something about it.

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend raised a specific case last night. He will fully understand that I cannot and will not comment on a specific case which is an operational matter, any more than he would intervene in a case in the civilian courts. On the general matter that he raises, I make two points. First, the Government recognise the convention, which has served the country well, that the armed forces and their personnel do not get involved in politics, but that does not mean that I and others are not well aware of the point that he raises. I have made it plain in words and deeds that we will not tolerate bullying.

The Government have been in office only six months. On questions of gender, harassment, treatment of ethnic minorities and meritocracy, I ask my hon. Friend to judge us by our deeds. I make the personal point that, while I find it of interest that people—not my hon. Friend but others—seek to enlighten me with philosophical tracts about the benefits of opening opportunities to people from working-class backgrounds, I and other Labour Ministers do not need to read the tracts. We have lived the experience. We value it because we come from that background.

We have made plain our intention to ensure that accessibility to our armed forces and promotion within them will be open to the widest possible reservoir of talent in our nation. Our armed forces will maintain their admired international position only if pathways to progress are open to the brightest and the best. That applies irrespective of ethnic origin, gender or social class. We know that that presents a stiff challenge in a changing age and we are under no illusions, but we are determined to give the issue the priority that it deserves.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Does the Minister suggest that what he describes is not the case at present and that there is active prejudice in career progression in the armed forces? I think that the armed forces may be rather surprised and disappointed to hear him say that.

Dr. Reid: The Chief of the General Staff held a press conference on Monday of last week in which he announced the Army's view that there was a perception of racism inside the Army. The Chief of the General Staff—not politicians—made it plain that he would not tolerate it. We applaud the Army for taking that initiative. We fully back it. It is not a matter of political correctness. The Army understands that if it is to maintain the reputation and admiration that it has won, it must respond to the world situation and the expectations of our people at home. I applaud the Army for its initiatives on racism and other matters.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State put into practice the Government's commitment to extending opportunities for women in the armed forces. Today's armed forces must be seen as somewhere where women can make progress. Yesterday's announcement has taken us one stage further in that direction.

We face a greater challenge in recruitment from the ethnic minorities. The armed forces have until relatively recently remained distanced from the progress in racial awareness made in other areas of society. It is regrettable—I let the facts speak for themselves—that only 1 per cent. of service men and women state that they are from an ethnic minority background. Ethnic minority recruiting has remained stubbornly low, despite intensive efforts. The Government and the armed forces are aware of our responsibility. We are examining the image of the services among ethnic minorities to see what more can be done to unlock barriers and remove misconceptions. We must also satisfy ourselves that there is no scope for discrimination or exclusion, and that we create a culture in which all personnel value, respect and learn from one another.

In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman), I say that I made it clear in my first days of office that we would not tolerate racism, bullying, sexual harassment or intolerance in the armed forces. In answer to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), I say that the service chiefs are equally determined that those things should not be tolerated. It will take time, but we are united in our resolve and determined to succeed.

I give the House a number of examples of what we are doing. We are striving to improve recruitment from our ethnic minority population. Exploratory talks have already taken place with local officials in Newham, east London, and the borough of Sandwell in the west midlands to examine how best to introduce recruiting drives in those areas. As I said, earlier this month, the Chief of the General Staff launched the Army's equal opportunities strategy. We do those things not only because they are just, although they are, not only because the Commission for Racial Equality has said that we must, although it has, but because the extension of opportunity is not only a moral imperative but a matter of effectiveness and efficiency for our armed forces.

If we are to ensure that the widest possible array of talent and the best possible quality of leadership are available to our armed forces, ability rather than gender, social class or ethnic origin must be the criterion according to which recruitment and promotion to leadership takes place.

When people raise the subject of racism with me and ask whether it is a matter of political correctness, I remind them that the most glorious hours of the British armed forces were spent when they stood alone against the most poisonous regime ever to emanate from the European continent. The poison at the heart of that regime was racism. There is no place for racism in the ethos of the British armed forces.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The Minister talked about consensus. I hope that he will agree that his Government are continuing the previous Government's policy. He will recall serving on the Select Committee that considered the Armed Forces Bill, which I chaired, where we gave the Commission for Racial Equality four years to report back so that when the Committee sat again in the year 2000 it would have a report that it could get its teeth into should it be necessary.

Dr. Reid: I willingly agree with that. I have made no allusion to any previous Government. What I have done, and what I hope that the House will do, is to identify those areas where we need to make improvements that are for the benefit of our armed forces and of the country. I do not lay complaints at the door of any previous Governments.

The efforts must not stop at the recruiting office. Once service personnel have joined the armed forces, we must ensure that we retain and develop their skills. In the last financial year, nearly 9 per cent. of our service personnel volunteered to leave the armed forces prematurely. That is unsustainable and it shows that something is wrong. The new Government are well aware of their responsibility to provide a stable and comprehensive structure to support service people in their work. Some of the key retention issues are being addressed through a comprehensive review of pay, allowances and charges following the independent review.

A new allowance package is being introduced on 1 December, designed to target resources where they can be most effective. For the future, we shall be introducing a new, more flexible pay system that will provide everyone with the opportunity to increase their earnings within their rank in recognition of experience and qualifications. That continued throughout the deliberations of the previous Government.

We are also committed to bringing service housing up to the highest standards. We are actively examining the complex and unsatisfactory range of death and injury benefits and our resettlement procedures. Those measures should help us to make a start in delivering the right quality of life, geared to the needs of the 21st century.

All those measures are directed at our most precious resource in the armed forces: our people. Of the three elements of fighting power—which include the conceptual element of doctrine, strategy and tactics, the physical element of tanks, battleships and aircraft—it is the third element, the moral element of purpose, kinship, direction, belonging and motivation, which is most often forgotten. It is forgotten because it is the hardest to define and to quantify, or to illustrate in learned books or accountants' ledgers. But without it the other two elements of fighting power are as nothing.

That is why my very first action as a Minister was to demonstrate clearly this Government's recognition of the duty that we owe to those men and women who serve their country, by responding to the concerns of Gulf veterans. The House will recall that we have doubled the financial resources allocated to dealing with that issue, enhanced the medical assessment programme and instituted a new programme of research. I am glad to be able to inform the House that almost half as many concerned veterans have been through the medical assessment programme in the past six months as had been through it in the previous four years.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend and I am grateful for the measures that have been taken in relation to Gulf war syndrome. May we have a similar sort of sympathetic review of the circumstances relating to the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association whose members gave similar sterling service to this country and who finished their engagements in difficult circumstances? They have suffered over the years, not only from personal disability,

[Mr. Frank Cook]

but because some of their offspring have been born with severe disabilities and have died early. Could we have a similar review for those people?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, who has been handling that issue, will be referring to that subject later, so my hon. Friend may want to wait for that contribution.

At the time of my earlier announcement, I instructed that a report be compiled on the scientific basis on which medical counter-measures—vaccines and NAPS tablets—were used in the Gulf, and I promised to publish it in full. I am pleased to tell the House that the report has been published today and a copy placed in the Library of the House.

When British troops are engaged in conflict, it is the duty of the Government of the day to make the best available choices in order to protect them. Those choices are not made in an ideal world, but involve hard judgments, and some risks often have to be taken. Speedy action was essential in 1990, as it has been on every other occasion.

As the House may already know, and as I confirmed today, some of the medical counter-measures used at the time were not licensed in the UK. The House will be aware that the fact that a medical product is unlicensed does not in itself mean either that it is untested or that it is inherently unsafe, but I thought that the facts deserved to be confirmed and made public.

One specific issue that the paper addresses is the simultaneous use of anthrax vaccine and pertussis, commonly referred to as whooping cough vaccine, which the Ministry of Defence envisaged with the object of increasing the efficacy—accelerating the effects—of the anthrax vaccine. In late 1990, the Department of Health notified the Ministry of Defence of anxieties over such simultaneous use, based on the preliminary findings of tests on laboratory animals. Despite my efforts and those of my officials, it has not been possible to establish whether the Department's anxieties were taken into account when formulating the final decision to use pertussis vaccine.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I thank my hon. Friend for seeing my constituents, Mr. Robertson, Mr. Doyle and Mr. Turnbull, within weeks of taking office and I thank him for putting the information before the House. In what way can my constituents and many other veterans receive the most up-to-date treatment and medicine available in the light of the knowledge that my hon. Friend now has? Is it not astonishing that that potent mix of vaccines was put into the veins of our soldiers? Surely, something can be done on health grounds.

Dr. Reid: With regard to the latter point, I said at the beginning of my speech that it is the primary duty of every Government to protect their service men and women. Our world is less than ideal; when a war was thrust upon us, I have no doubt that the Government of the time were motivated by a desire to protect our service men and women. We have extended and widely advertised the assessment facilities and I hope that my hon. Friend's constituents will take advantage of that.

I should emphasise that the use of pertussis vaccine in that way is not a common factor linking UK veterans who are ill with those from other coalition countries, particularly the United States of America. Only British troops were given this particular combination of vaccines, but it is not only British troops who are ill.

The information that I am making available today is as complete as we can make it. I hope that it will help Members of the House, Gulf veterans and the general public better to understand the background to matters which for some years have been a source of confusion, misunderstanding and mistrust.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The Minister knows that the subject of Gulf war syndrome occasions great anxiety on both sides of the House. He knows that in the previous Parliament the Select Committee on Defence wrote a stringent report about what it believed should be done. In the light of what the Minister has said and of all the other information that is now available to him in his new capacity, does he believe that it is time that we decided to award compensation on a no-fault basis to those who can establish that their present condition has arisen as a result of their service in the Gulf?

Dr. Reid: First, the hon. and learned Gentleman knows that compensation is already available in the form of a war pension, which is not insignificant when translated into a capital sum. Secondly, the problem is not only that no fault has been established; no cause has been established. If it were within my power—which it is not—to say exactly what the Gulf war illnesses are and what caused them, I, like many others in the House, would do so. The reality is, however, that a cause has not been established and no responsible Government—no matter how sympathetic—can pay compensation when no fault and no cause have been established without opening the floodgates to anyone who wants to claim on any occasion.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Reid: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but then I must make progress with my speech.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the Minister's concern and his positive approach to this issue. My question is simple, because I understand the concept of no fault. Some veterans have not yet had back their medical returns; these are taking so long that the veterans might run out of time for making claims. Have there been inordinate delays in getting the returns back? Will it be permissible for the veterans to go beyond the time span?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman will understand that the assessment for war pensions is not carried out by my Ministry, but by the Department of Social Security. If we can do anything to speed up the process, we will do it.

I should have mentioned that I am also publishing today a further memorandum about the circumstances in which Parliament was misled concerning the use of organophosphate pesticides during the Gulf war. It includes details of an investigation carried out earlier this year which could not be published at the time because disciplinary procedures were contemplated. The paper also reports the outcome of those disciplinary procedures, which are that three service and civil service personnel are the subject of formal action in respect of their conduct in relation to the events set out in that report.

I place great emphasis on bringing these matters to the House, not only because of the debt of honour that we owe to those who have served their country, but because of the wider obligations to the people of this nation to explain the actions that were taken. I hope that we can now follow up on the fresh start by the new Government by drawing a line under past events and concentrating on future action to help veterans, which should be the focus of our attention.

The great achievements of our services should not be a well-kept secret. The only way to keep the faith of the nation and to build on the trust that we have with the people is to be as open as possible. That relates not only to service personnel issues, but to what our services are doing, and it may help to increase the knowledge of the sterling work our forces do. That is why we have increased the number of places on the armed forces parliamentary scheme from eight to 20 per annum. I am pleased to tell the House that we are over-subscribed this year, so any hon. Member who wishes to apply for next year should get the application in now because there is a big queue for places on detachment to our armed forces.

Defence is not a stand-alone activity. The armed forces and the tasks that they carry out are part of the fabric of our national life. Defence is a major employer—not only in the Ministry and the services, which sustain some 340,000 jobs, but in the defence industry and in the wider community. The armed forces are also linked to our wider community through the volunteer reserve forces, who continue to make an important contribution—none more so than the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. I am delighted to announce that, following the successful trials at RAF Benson last year under the former Minister for the Armed Forces, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), the RAF intends to create a further four role-support squadrons. Those will provide regular RAF units with support in a variety of roles in peacekeeping and crisis management. I hope that the House will applaud that welcome boost to the opportunities available to reservists, which shows how seriously we take their role.

Mr. Brazier: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Reid: No, I have given way enough and I must make progress.

It is on operations that the courage and professionalism of our armed forces are best seen. I have had the opportunity to visit our troops in Northern Ireland. Despite the welcome progress in the political sphere, it is our troops who still stand vigilant against terrorism in that unhappy province.

Increasingly, the tasks of our armed forces are overseas, supporting the maintenance of international order. In the skies over Iraq, in the Gulf, in Cyprus, in the Adriatic and in Bosnia, the RAF, the Navy and the Army stand sentinel for the international community. The tragic conflict in Bosnia has engaged our complete attention and we are well aware of the role played by British troops, but I should like to mention that the British forces serving with the stabilisation force performed with great courage and skill when, earlier this year in Prijedor, they acted in support of international law and order to detain persons indicted for war crimes.

As our forces answer the challenges put before them, others escalate in scale and import. We put the global fight against the drugs trade higher on the priority list than it has been for many years. The West Indies guard ship merits particular mention in that context and its conspicuous success is highlighted by involvement in the seizure of more than £150 million worth of drugs. New agreements with the United States are now being finalised, which should improve further the effectiveness of our combined anti-drugs efforts.

New challenges emerge, as do new opportunities. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said yesterday, defence diplomacy must be another emerging area to which our armed forces can contribute greatly, not only through NATO and other international organisations, but through our extensive bilateral defence relationships. Nearly 1,000 activities took place during 1997, ranging from joint exercises to visits of specialist training teams to secondment of senior officers and civil servants—1,000 activities involving the British armed forces contributing to a safer, more secure world.

The challenges and the opportunities continue to grow, but we must not forget the importance of matching resources to commitments and I have made plain the Government's commitment to seek benefits for the taxpayer by ensuring that every penny that is spent is spent wisely. In an increasingly uncertain age, our armed forces are being asked to fulfil a wider range of tasks than ever before—not merely in our defence interests, but in support of the promotion of the common good, both in our own country and throughout the international community.

I believe that the service that those men and women offer this country—a service which, in its ultimate form, embraces the potential sacrifice of life and limb—is matched by the inescapable duty of the Government, on behalf of the country, to provide leadership, care and resources commensurate to that commitment. That is a duty which the Government readily undertake and a pledge which I willingly give.

5.7 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Our annual two-day defence debate always generates a remarkable breadth and depth of discussion, ranging from international and strategic affairs and perspectives to the erudite examination of the merits of procurement decisions. That is all right and proper. In opening for the Opposition on the second day, my first duty is to put on the record our thanks and admiration for the dedication of the hundreds of thousands of people who are the prime asset of our nation's defence—those in uniform and in the scientific and industrial civil service, agency staff and contractors' staff.

Since 1 May, it has been said time and again by Ministers that defence was not an issue in the general election. If the Government really believe that, we are living in dangerous days. Hon. Members who take even a passing interest in defence know that defence is a live issue. Anyone travelling abroad, be it to France or to the far east, knows that defence is an issue. The United Kingdom's military will probably see more active service in the next two or three decades than in the five decades since world war two.

I shall now comment on what the Minister for the Armed Forces said about progress in research on Gulf war illness. Undoubtedly, hundreds of men and women who

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fought in the Gulf are ill. They need help, which is available through their general practitioners and the wider national health service. The challenge for the medical and scientific community has been to identify a syndrome or common theme with a common cause and then, if they meet that challenge, to discover whether there is a common cure. The previous Government therefore asked the Medical Research Council to design and commission appropriate research. Ministers emphasised time and again that they had an open mind, and we must all continue to have an open mind while doctors and scientists explain to us what has happened over the years.

In the previous Parliament, the Defence Select Committee discovered serious failings in the way in which the Army had administered substances and recorded—or rather, not recorded—who had been given what, but we welcome the latest initiative to piece together that very distressing jigsaw.

People who understand freedom know that if we want peace we must prepare for war—high-intensity war. In Britain, we understand that the end of the cold war brought more, not less, instability. We know that to keep the peace in Bosnia we need the AS90 gun and the Challenger tank, as well as friendly soldiers in shirt-sleeve order and election observers.

Then there is Trident. When Labour Members were lining up to support the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Conservative position on Trident was solid—and so it is now. I genuinely welcome the Labour Government to this common ground of hard and realistic defence policy. They have come in from the cold, but they have not even taken off their overcoats, let alone sat down to talk about their conversion. We are a bit suspicious. Are they about to try and tiptoe out again? Will the coats that they leave behind turn out to be ours after all, returned as MOD surplus to requirement now that they have won the general election?

The Government have bought the planned extra missiles, but they are going to reduce the warheads. They have decided not to scrap the fourth Trident submarine, but we understand that they might tie her up alongside the other three. If our entire nuclear deterrent fleet is berthed, crewless and effectively mothballed, what does that say about the seriousness of our deterrent? What signals does it send about our role in the world under Labour? What does it say about the relationship between the Secretary of State for Defence and the Foreign Secretary?

In paragraph 203 of the Ministry of Defence performance report published yesterday, we read:

> "Trident already provides a continuously available sub-strategic capability. This will become fully robust when Vigilant joins the operational cycle later in 1997. The four boat Trident fleet will ensure that such patrols can continue to be maintained throughout the lifetime of the Trident force."

That is what we signed up to.

In paragraph 243, we read of a remarkable Royal Navy deployment, Ocean Wave:

> "The Royal Navy embarked on a seven month deployment to the Asia Pacific region in January 1997. The deployment, known as OCEAN WAVE 97 and comprising some 20 ships, aimed to demonstrate the UK's commitment to the region, to test the Royal Navy's ability to deploy an operationally effective and self-sustaining force out of area and to underline the UK's continuing interest in promoting international peace and stability. There were numerous major and minor exercises together with an array of goodwill visits to further these aims. The Task Group returned in August 1997."

That proud report will be a matter of history, never to be repeated, if the Government will not send Trident to sea and if they cut naval capabilities—perhaps even decide not to replace our three aircraft carriers. There is not much hope for consensus down that route.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. Will he tell me, first, the Conservative party view of the non-proliferation treaty and the duty of the Government to ensure that they do not breach it and, secondly, whether any Conservative Defence Minister ever gave details at the Dispatch Box of a Trident mission?

Mr. Key: Of course not, because it has rightly always been a matter of convention in all Governments that deployment of our nuclear deterrent remains a secret. On the first point, the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that our position was laid out by our Defence Ministers year after year after year to the House, and our position remains as stated.

Into our homes, and into our hearts and minds, television brings not only sanitised "defence" as soaps and documentaries, but the reality of death and destruction, maiming and killing. It also brings images of peace enforcement, peacekeeping on land and sea and in the air, and the hope of millions for normality and freedom.

The world has probably understood for longer than us the value to our nation of soldiers in khaki who, in a good cause, fight and win when others fail, and can then don red tunics and gently bear a princess to her funeral before the eyes of the world. Who says now that pomp and ceremony have had their day?

Defence may not have been a party issue in Hamilton, South. I suspected that the Labour candidate who is now Secretary of State for Defence never mentioned it in his general election address because he had hoped to be Secretary of State for Scotland. I checked, and he did not mention defence in his election address. Next door, in Hamilton, North and Bellshill, I assumed that the Labour candidate's election address would be very strong on defence, because he hoped to be Secretary of State for Defence. I was wrong; the present Minister for the Armed Forces did not mention defence even in his election address.

However, defence certainly was an issue in Hampshire, North-West, as it was in the Salisbury constituency. In our constituencies, the military of all three services and all ranks did not forget that new Labour's architects and masters had fraternised with CND in the cold war years. All our constituents knew what it was like to sustain men and women who, as well as being prepared to die for their country in war, made the peacetime sacrifices of difficult, often dangerous and usually repetitive service away from home, in some obscure place, and in pursuit of what they perceived to be someone else's problem. "Overstretch" became a household word.

While Labour dithered and demonstrated, in the 1980s, Conservative policies won the day. The cold war ended. Changes in defence were inevitable. The past decade has witnessed review after review of the military. The previous Secretary of State, Michael Portillo, at last promised a period of stability. In Westminster, one could almost hear the sigh from Salisbury plain. Last year, the Defence Select Committee, of which I was a member, produced a unanimous report declaring that, as a percentage of gross domestic product, the defence budget had reached 1930s levels and must fall no more. The names are recorded.

In the most recent general election, Labour prayed that defence would not attract the media's attention. Labour did not fool its old Labour left wingers. They held their breath long enough to win the election, but by July they had found their wind again. Of course we have not heard from them in this debate—although we may still—but we heard them over the weekend in the media. They are alive and well.

In Bosnia earlier this month, a soldier in a remote camp told me that he had just received a letter from his wife in England. She was worried sick that she would not make ends meet until he came home. Her husband explained that she was a good manager, but, like most service wives, did not have access to the charge card or credit facilities that most people now take for granted. This is certainly not a party political issue.

Did you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that men and women serving in our forces are denied store cards by excellent establishments such as Marks and Spencer, Waitrose and many others? I only mention those because they were specifically complained of to me. I shop at both, so I hold no prejudice against them. Why does this happen? First, the credit raters classify as a bad risk a person who moves house within less than three years. That includes most service married quarters. Secondly, credit rating databases often record bad debts by address, not by occupant. On moving from one service married quarter to another, it is possible to inherit a bad address.

I commend the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute's financial services department for understanding the problem, but I hope that Ministers will join us in urging the financial world to treat forces families fairly. I hope that we can all agree on that. There can be little risk in offering modest credit to men and women in uniform, subject to the discipline of the chain of command. The Army Families Federation told me last week that military personnel returning home from abroad can be sure of a BT phone line only if they pay by direct debit because they are regarded as a bad-debt risk.

Another issue that can impact heavily on service families is eligibility for benefits, including jobseeker's allowance. We want our forces to "follow the flag". We recognise that times have changed and that many wives have their own careers and earnings expectations. When a spouse is posted, a hard-won job must come to an end. The Department for Education and Employment, however, deems all wives to have made themselves voluntarily redundant.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Key: I shall give way when I have finished the point.

Wives must throw themselves on the mercy of adjudication officers; otherwise, they may lose benefits. I raised the matter with Ministers in the previous Government earlier this year and on 7 April the then Under-Secretary of State told me that the Ministry of Defence would establish how the system was working in practice. I should be grateful if Ministers would now tell us what progress has been made in respect of a phenomenon that arose after the new system was introduced. Naturally, it is important that Departments work together and accommodate each other's changes. I am not making a party political point, but it would make a real difference if the Ministry of Defence would ensure that Army wives' point of view was heard in that respect.

Those are the everyday problems faced by forces families. We must never forget that those people are not just part of our military community. This is not just a behind-the-wire issue. Pay and conditions, the state of married quarters, problems of the defence medical services and the much improved world of service education focus on the Ministry of Defence. Forces families are, however, also part of all our communities. We are proud of them and grateful to them.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State announced a modest increase in the number of opportunities for women in the Army. That is fine. It is an unsurprising extension of the equal opportunity policies put in place by the Conservative Government. Any hesitation on our part—any caution—is born of practical problems and experience, which the new Ministers lack. As with the issue of homosexuality in the armed forces, it is no good forcing political correctness on the Navy, Army and Air Force if they are not ready for it and if it would impair their front-line effectiveness. Politicians and campaigners alike must recognise that the ethos of service life is different from civvy street. We expect military personnel to live their lives by higher standards and different codes of behaviour. Change is slow because it must take place for the right reasons. The enforced and repeated separation of husbands and wives in the forces leads to great tensions. Many wives will worry about an increase in the number of women in the forces. That is understandable; I hope that it will be groundless.

In July, I wrote to the Minister for the Armed Forces about another problem. Each of our three services has its own codes of conduct, traditions, prejudices and sanctions. The Minister and I know, and there is now wide recognition, that moral or social behaviour that is apparently acceptable in one service is not acceptable in another. He and I know of at least one case where an officer in one service has had his whole life ruined while the other party in a different service remains undisciplined, with his or her career unscathed. More joint service operations and more women close to the front are likely to exacerbate that problem, which can and should be addressed. We must not allow another decade to slip by without consolidating into a single Act the Navy, Army and Air Force discipline Acts.

I also pay tribute to the many thousands of scientific, industrial and administrative civil servants on whom our fighting forces depend. Those dedicated men and women are too often taken for granted until some crisis calls for their years of training and experience. We then know that we can count on them and that they will give their all, too. The first contractorisation of industrial civil servants took place at Boscombe Down in my constituency more than a decade ago. Since then, Ministry of Defence personnel have endured shake ups as great as anything in the private sector. Generally, they have been beneficial.

[Mr. Key]

We shall examine in great detail the Government's proposal for a defence diversification agency. We shall need to see vision and purpose in their plans for a defence evaluation and research agency before agreeing another shake up, but we shall give it positive consideration.

Occasionally, one must draw a firm line in the interests of national security. One such case that we are watching closely is the impact on the work force of Royal Ordnance in Bridgwater as well as the impact on national security of the proposed merger, or joint venture, under consideration between Royal Ordnance's owner, British Aerospace and the French company, SNPE. We understand the concerns of the Royal Ordnance work force and those expressed last night by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) about the importance of maintaining a British capability in the manufacture of ammunition explosives.

Have the Government decided whether to allow that joint venture to proceed? As we had no direct answers from the Government yesterday, I should be grateful for some answers later this evening.

Mr. Godman: The concerns voiced by the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) on behalf of the work force in Bridgwater are shared by the employees of Royal Ordnance in Bishopton in Renfrewshire. I, too, would like some satisfactory answers concerning their continued employment in both establishments.

Mr. Key: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. His intervention gives me an opportunity to put on record the fact that the trade unions, who prepared excellent briefings for Conservative Members, are clearly not opposed in principle to the commercial success of their enterprises. Nor are they opposed to the internationalisation of the production process. They rightly fear for their members' jobs, however, and have a commendable concern for the national interest when it comes to defence. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will get the news that he wants tonight.

The Royal Ordnance work force is an important part of the 400,000-strong UK defence industry. We salute our defence industry. The British defence manufacturing industry is not just world class, though it is; it is not just the world's favourite, though it is; it is a world-beating industry. It is probably the most heavily regulated industry in Britain today. Literally every bag of screws—let alone Land Rover—is subject to interminable scrutiny by at least three, sometimes four or even five, Departments of State and to United Nations, European Union and British Government export criteria and conditions.

The Conservative Government had no hesitation in accepting the moral and ethical dimensions of exporting defence equipment. Conservatives believe in article 51 of the United Nations charter—the right to self-defence—with all its implications for the purchase of defence products. The UN charter is indivisible. Some Labour Members want to pick and mix. The question is not whether Britain had an ethical foreign policy before 1 May—of course it did. The question is: how ethical is it for the Government to put at risk the jobs of 400,000 of our citizens to appease their own moral vanity? That new vanity is interpreted by friendly countries as moral imperialism, and they say so. New Labour—new imperialism.

Mr. Blunt: My hon. Friend will be interested to know that the first evidence of the cost of that new morality to British interests and jobs has already been made clear by Vosper Thornycroft not winning a substantial contract for Malaysian patrol vessels, which went—in as yet unexplained circumstances—to a German competitor, despite the fact that Vosper thought that it was doing extremely well. The Turkish Government are now warning the British defence firm—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Gentleman is supposed to be making an intervention. He cannot make such a long intervention. He can make a comment to the Front-Bench spokesman, and that must be the end of that.

Mr. Blunt: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The point that I wish to make is that the $7.5 billion Turkish market now seems to have gone for a Burton because of Labour's foreign policy.

Mr. Key: I fear that we shall hear many more stories like that. My hon. Friend is right, and I shall refer to further examples of the changes that have taken place in the past six months or so.

The practical implications of that new vanity intrude in two ways: first, through the strategic defence review, of which my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) spoke yesterday; and, secondly, in procurement terms. It has been drawn to my attention that not just hundreds of millions but billions of pounds worth of defence procurement programmes have been destabilised by the incoming Labour Government. My fax has been red hot with tales of disbelief and woe by the bucketload.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) winds up the debate for the Opposition, he will have something to say about restructuring the European defence industry, the importance of this country's relationship with the United States and the dangers of a fortress Europe attitude to procurement.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): While the hon. Gentleman is discussing arms sales abroad, and especially possible arms sales to Turkey, should he not use his position to say something about the systematic abuse of human rights in Turkey, the incursion into neighbouring countries by the Turkish armed forces, and the deaths of thousands of Kurdish people in the war going on in the east of that country? Does he not think that we have a role to play in not providing arms that can be used to kill so many civilians?

Mr. Key: Of course we have a role to play, although I dare say that Mr. Deputy Speaker would say that that is for a foreign policy debate rather than this one. I have no doubt of the defence dimension of it, and I have no hesitation in pointing out that any export to any of those countries is subject to the range of inquiries that I described a few minutes ago. There is nothing new in the so-called ethical foreign policy. It has always been there.

The Conservative Government ensured that our forces would be better equipped than ever before. There was a sea change in the way in which the Ministry of Defence made its contracts. The Labour Government will be lucky if smart procurement achieves half as much as the Conservative reforms. There is nothing smart in new Labour slithering back into its old bureaucratic ways by imposing new copy-in-triplicate, buck-passing, time-wasting procedures, while Defence Ministers wait by the month to hear whether the Foreign Secretary approves and wait until next year to hear whether the Chancellor will allow them to defend our nation as it should be defended.

The stress that the strategic defence review is causing the procurement industry is unjustified. The list of projects concerned about the future is long: Bowman, ASTOR, COBRA, Skynet 5, EH101, Apache, multi-role armoured vehicle, future engineer tanks, future large aircraft, aircraft carrier replacements—the list is endless. Even Eurofighter is not sacrosanct if the Treasury will not pay or if it modifies the spending profile. It was the commitment of the Conservative Government to Eurofighter that convinced our partners to proceed with that project. We need Eurofighter.

Before and after the general election, we were promised that the strategic defence review would last six months, starting on 2 May. Now we are told that it will be another six months. There is no consensus across the Floor of the House on that.

Meanwhile, the people who form the greatest part of the nation's defence are kept in the dark. The foreign policy base lines are secret. The Minister of State for the Armed Forces wriggled around on this point a few minutes ago. Until the foreign policy base lines are made public, we are in no position to make a judgment, and we will not hear that until after the Treasury has decided whether the Ministry of Defence can have what it wants. There is no consensus on that between the parties.

In the short term, while we wait, thousands of long-term jobs are being put at risk. Most of the defence equipment exported from the United Kingdom by most of the companies involved is pretty uncontentious. That is why the Department of Trade and Industry export licensing unit has committed itself through its code of practice to achieve a target for obtaining licence approvals of 20 working days from receipt of the application.

The unit was not doing badly until April. According to the DTI, in April 93 per cent. of straightforward licences were being cleared in 20 days, and 70 per cent. of those that had to be circulated to other Government Departments were being cleared in 20 days. By September, under Labour, the rate for simple applications had slipped back to 60 per cent., and joint decisions had slumped to just 48 per cent. achieving target. The DTI receives more than 1,000 applications a month, and is clearing less than half.

I remind the House that the vast majority of those export orders are for products already manufactured for Britain's forces and help to keep down the cost to our taxpayers. Above all, they keep British people in British jobs. British firms are sympathetic towards harassed officials in Government Departments who have had a new regime imposed on them, with no increase in resources or manpower. This is a new problem entirely created by this Government—new Labour, new problem.

I know that the main problem lies with the DTI, not the MOD, but let me explain why it matters to the entire Government and to our nation. Not only are British firms suffering lengthy processing delays, but it is now virtually impossible for them to obtain a reason for a delay or a date by which a decision will be made. Many of those companies have been trading in the same products with the same countries for years. Labour has imposed lengthy delay and query, even on non-lethal repeat business.

Customers—usually overseas Governments or their agencies—place worldwide competitive bids against demanding terms and conditions of supply, including performance bonds supported by irrevocable bank guarantees, liquidated and consequential penalty clauses for late delivery and, of course, the final sanction—disbarment from future tenders.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): In speaking about the increased competition that British companies face, and recognising the importance of the ethical dimension to our defence export sales, has my hon. Friend noticed the interesting report that President Mandela is to go to Saudi Arabia in two weeks to seek to achieve substantial defence exports for South African companies? One does not imagine that President Mandela would be involved in anything the least bit unethical, but that puts into context some Labour Members' inclination to criticise any defence exports, and draws attention to the threat that our companies face from increasing overseas competition.

Mr. Key: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that telling point. He is right. The South African defence industry is a worldwide industry and is very good indeed. It is tendering for many of our traditional markets and winning in some of them. We must be fully aware that the competition that we face from sources that we hitherto considered beyond the pale is now making a great inroad into our potential business.

Time is of the essence when responding to contractual delivery dates. Once the capital outlay for the prime contractor capital system or equipment has been purchased, it is crucial that the supply of expendable goods and services be available on demand. Our defence export industry has been winning new export orders in the face of fierce international competition. The Government's dead hand on export licences has already resulted in serious damage to UK exporters' credibility to contractually perform as a reliable quality supplier. Export orders have been cancelled because of late delivery caused by the lack of a licence.

Substantial costs have been incurred by British industry for liquidated damages and additional shipping costs. US and European competitors have moved in very fast on our export markets. How much longer are Ministers prepared to sit on their hands and see British exports lost and British jobs lost? More quickly than I expected, unemployment will rise in this sector. It is still true: Labour is not working. There is no consensus.

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that during 18 years of Conservative government, hundreds of thousands of jobs were lost in the defence industry, and particularly close to home, 10,000 jobs were lost in my constituency and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline,

[Ms Rachel Squire]

East (Mr. Brown) at Rosyth naval base and Rosyth dockyard, as a direct consequence of the hon. Gentleman's Government's decisions?

Mr. Key: I should like the hon. Lady to speculate on what those figures would have been if a Labour Government had been in place. I remind her that although all of us who have defence-oriented constituencies saw dramatic changes in employment patterns, we ended up with hundreds of thousands of new jobs, economic activity rates in this country higher than anywhere else in Europe, and unemployment lower and falling.

Yesterday my right hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State laid out clearly our position on land mines. I shall merely emphasise one point and make one other. If the Government want consensus, they are more likely to find it on the issue of anti-personnel land mines than on many other issues. The new Government must realise that, as any infantryman will tell them, mines save lives as well as taking them. Used properly, they can be an effective, efficient, time-limited deterrent and defence.

The British Army felt that it was bounced by the new Government's announcement on mines, in respect of both details and timing. That was neither wise nor competent. Further progress can, will and should be made. It will succeed if it has the full agreement and support of the armed services down the chain of command and heeds the advice of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

Mr. Frank Cook: Will the hon. Gentleman accept from me a copy of the paper written by the former Engineer-General Sir Hugh Beech, in which he makes the case that the military purpose of anti-personnel mines has been long outlived? He says that they are redundant and that sensors are available with sufficient range and accuracy to draw direct and indirect fire to any kind of incoming incursion force, thereby making APMs unnecessary for the safety of our own people and providing support for his view that in the past our APMs have killed more of our own men than enemy forces.

Mr. Key: I am aware of those views, and of course I respect them. I should be delighted to see the paper: I think that it is important to be as well informed as possible about such issues. I warmly welcome the promise of money and training facilities for mine clearance work. However, what will be the impact on the Royal Engineers in terms of deployment, recruitment and retention? That issue must be considered.

I issue a word of warning to Ministers, who are prone to photo opportunities that they regret later. I propose to make a deal between Front Benchers on the issue of land mines: no more stunts. The issue is too serious. We must stand back and leave it to the experts.

The image of the late Princess of Wales in an Angolan minefield will stay with millions. Back in the United Kingdom, I know that many thought it undignified—or even stupid—for a role model such as Her Majesty's Secretary of State for International Development to dress up and smilingly wave about weapons responsible for such carnage. That stunt did little to help the cause—it simply was not worth it. As for the Secretary of State for Defence, I will spare his blushes.

A couple of weeks ago—right on cue before the return of Parliament—the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced his first raid on the defence budget. How did the Secretary of State for Defence respond? He invited the pop group Verve to rent disused MOD property for concerts. That is good news for fans of Verve and good news for the Treasury. It may work when looking for small change, but it will not do as a serious response when defence coffers are empty, when the cupboard is bare and when the Treasury is no longer the MOD's flexible friend. I fear that defence Ministers will then be the Treasury's flexible friends.

British defence costs increased greatly after the inception of IFOR in December 1995 because of the doubling in size of the British force in Bosnia. The costs totalled £244 million to the end of March 1997—that is £60 million for 1995–96, £160 million for 1996–97, and a separate £24 million in 1996–97 for the cost of the RAF contribution to the air component of IFOR, Operation Decisive Edge, based in Italy. The Ministry of Defence was reimbursed for the total sum of £244 million from the Treasury contingency reserves. The MOD would seek to recoup the additional costs from the reserve should it not be able to absorb them

"without detriment to the rest of the defence programme".—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1996; Vol. 286, c. 29.]

In July this year, when responding to a parliamentary question, the Minister for the Armed Forces stated that the cost of Britain's military contingent of IFOR, including its air support component, was estimated at "something over £200 million" in the 1997–98 financial year. That would be about 1 per cent. of the overall defence budget. Given that the size of the British force in Bosnia has fallen significantly since the early days of a direct NATO role in that country—it now stands at about 5,300 men—the £200 million plus might include some of the £120 million mentioned in November 1996 as being additional costs for repair and restocking.

I can find no reference to any commitment by the Treasury to fund the costs of United Kingdom peace implementation in Bosnia from the reserves in this financial year. Has the Ministry of Defence conducted negotiations with the Treasury on that matter? Has there been a settlement? Will defence lose 1 per cent. of its budget in addition to the 1 per cent. fine given to health—£168 million? Are the Government getting careless? Have they lost 2 per cent. of the defence budget since May?

By summer 1996, Conservative Defence Ministers and the then Defence Select Committee were showing not just inflexibility to Treasury pressure but a new steeliness in their approach to defence expenditure. I pay tribute to Michael Portillo, whose instinct for defence won him many friends in all three armed services as well as in the Ministry of Defence. I was grateful to hear the Minister pay tribute to him last night. As a former Chief Secretary, Michael Portillo would spot a weak spending programme better than anyone—but he also knew a bottom line when he saw it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) knew his business as Minister for the Armed Forces inside out. He made it his duty to understand what was going on at the sharp end of the services. It is no secret that his frustration with the Treasury attitude to defence brought him, with great honour, close to resignation.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot) was ruthlessly inquisitive about the procurement programme for which he was responsible. It was not very smart of the incoming Government to claim credit, after just a week or two, for fundamental improvements and new approaches that were put in place during my hon. Friend's term of office. My noble friend Lord Howe proved as a defence Minister that his blood flowed not just blue, but royal blue, light blue and khaki as well.

The previous Defence Select Committee was unanimous in its view that the defence spending plan for this nation had reached rock bottom. Many members of that Committee have been replaced by the electorate or by the mysterious machinations of the appointments process in the House. I was very pleased to see the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) elected as Chairman. He has a proud record on defence and a deep knowledge of his subject—unlike the Minister. In view of all that the hon. Member for Walsall, South has said over the years—on the record and off it—we would not want to see him resign his chairmanship of the Defence Committee. Yet we know that he would not flinch from that decision if he were pushed too far.

Similarly, we do not want to see the Minister for Defence Procurement pushed off his perch. Only last year, he said:

> "I also happen to think that this country does not spend enough on defence".—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1996; Vol. 282, c. 506.]

Quite so. The Opposition need Lord Gilbert, even if the Government do not.

What about Defence Ministers? Without fear of contradiction, I assert that they are all nice men—more than that, they are thoroughly decent and honourable. They are delightful and hard-working opponents. I think that they honestly went to the recent general election and accepted office believing that the strategic defence review would be just that. However, where is the beef? Labour sneered before the general election that its approach to defence is fundamentally different from that of the Conservatives, yet now the Government are begging for consensus. They might get it—on our terms.

Innocents that they were, Labour Members did not imagine that they would be rolled over, first by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and then by the Treasury. The muggings began, and the parliamentary answers became more defensive and more opaque. Labour Members were bound hand and foot, with rope to spare. Gordon marched them up to the top of the hill and he marched them down again. They sailed away for a year and a day—it will be that long before we know the real outcome of the SDR.

I hope that Defence Ministers are not in office for long—but I hope that they enjoy their tenure. While they are in office, the nation will expect them to fight new Labour in the Treasury. I fear that prospects are not good and that it is time for us to know where the beef is. I suspect that Ministers will need divine intervention—at breakfast, lunch, dinner and at tea. Given their ministerial record so far—and to remind them what we are on about—I recommend that Defence Ministers say grace before every meal: the politician's grace, "God bless our food and God bless our words in case we need to eat them later."

5.48 pm

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): We have heard a fascinating speech by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). I thought the best part was his claim that the Opposition need Lord Gilbert. They need anyone who can make a better speech than the hon. Gentleman. If that is the extent of the criticism that the Opposition can make of the Government's defence policy, anyone could do better—perhaps even the Liberals.

It is often said that the problem with Defence Ministers and military commanders is that they are always fighting the last war: they base their decisions on the last war rather than the next. We heard the hon. Member for Salisbury refight the last election and, in many of his allusions, refight the 1979 general election. Looking to the past is not the way to establish a sensible defence policy for this country.

I have some sympathy with the hon. Member for Salisbury and his colleagues who said that we need to base our defence policy on foreign policy. The hon. Gentleman said that we need what he called foreign policy base lines. He is absolutely right about that, but he and his friends have not been listening. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has spelt out the basis of our defence policy—the Government's defence review—in several speeches. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Salisbury is interrupting from a sedentary position. I suggest that, instead of researching my right hon. Friend's election address, he would do better to research my right hon. Friend's speeches.

Mr. Key: I have read them.

Mr. Davis: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman needs not only to read but to reread them. He would then see that my right hon. Friend has spelt out several times the basic policy guidelines of our foreign policy in relation to our defence policy.

A surprising omission from the speeches made by Opposition Members today and yesterday has been any welcome for the Government's emphasis, which was spelt out clearly at the beginning of the Secretary of State's speech yesterday, on defence being cost-effective. That notion is welcomed by every Labour Member.

I entirely endorse what my right hon. Friend said, but I hope that I may presume to make one suggestion: perhaps he could ask one of his junior Ministers or a parliamentary private secretary to read the National Audit Office's reports and the Public Accounts Committee's reports of the past 10 years and to make a list of their recommendations and findings. On the basis of that list, my right hon. Friend could then ask what has happened as a result of those reports, because if there was one Government Department that wasted a colossal amount of money under the previous Government it was the Ministry of Defence. Every NAO report presented to the House contained a scandal in terms of the Ministry of Defence not getting value for money.

I commend that suggestion to the Secretary of State. We have all seen the Treasury minutes—the bland and banal assurances that action would be taken—but it would be worth looking back over published information to ascertain what is happening to ensure that the Ministry of Defence achieves value for money.

[Mr. Davis]

Another aspect of getting value for money is the emphasis on the fact that this country's defence is now based on collective defence. We are in alliances; the days have gone when we could rely solely on our own resources and efforts and on the ability and professional skills of our armed forces to defend the United Kingdom. We are into collective defence, a change which has occurred over the past 50 or 60 years.

I found my right hon. Friend's references to working with our allies in NATO very encouraging. I was, however, a little disappointed that he made no reference at all to the importance of the Western European Union as the European hard core of NATO and the need to work closely with our allies in the rest of Europe through the WEU to ensure the defence of this country in the widest sense.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Robertson) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Davis: I see that my right hon. Friend is nodding, so I think that he has taken the point.

We congratulated the Prime Minister on his success at Amsterdam, where he achieved an objective that was common to the Government and the Conservative Opposition. When the positions were reversed, the Labour Opposition supported the Conservative Government in arguing that the WEU should not be integrated into the European Union but be kept as a separate entity. Only the Liberal party thought that it should be integrated.

What happened at Amsterdam, however, means that there is an obligation on the British Government to ensure that more is now done to sort out the working relationship between the European Union and the WEU. We cannot simply sit back and say that Amsterdam was successful; we have an obligation to ensure that that relationship, which is crucial to any European security and defence policy or identity, is sorted out. I see very little being done in that respect, but it is something which we should take into account in the next few months, and especially when the United Kingdom holds the presidency of the Council of Ministers.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State goes to Russia next week to meet his counterpart there, and it is significant that a delegation from the Russian Duma is coming in the opposite direction to meet representatives of the WEU Assembly so that we can discuss at parliamentary level the development of a common defence and the implications for Russia, Russia's neighbours and the WEU of common objectives and arrangements.

I greatly welcome the openness with which my right hon. Friend has approached the strategic defence review. It is a genuine effort to involve as many people as possible, to take advice and suggestions and to listen to what is said in many quarters. On the other hand, we can perhaps consider whether the trend has gone far enough, in that, if we believe in collective defence and are basing our policy on an alliance or alliances, it would be sensible in the course of the review to take account of the views expressed and the contributions made by our allies. The extent to which the Government are doing that is not clear. It may be happening, but I would appreciate some clarification in the winding-up speech of the extent to which the review takes account of our allies' views and contributions.

The Secretary of State made another important point yesterday when he said that our enemy is instability. Members of all parties have paid tribute to the contribution of our armed forces in Bosnia, but there has been one outstanding example of instability in the past six months to which the United Kingdom has not offered assistance—Albania.

I appreciate that the problem in Albania erupted before the general election, so crucial decisions would have been taken before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State took office. However, the Government could have contributed to the efforts made in Albania by other WEU countries and, I think, some central European countries because there was a period after the election when it was still possible to do so. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary would clarify our reasons for not assisting our friend and allies. Perhaps we did not want to get involved, or perhaps we wanted to get involved but could not do so because we did not have the resources. In any event, we must be clear about the Government's rationale for not joining a number of countries, which played a major part in bringing stability to Albania at a very important time.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State also said that ethnic disputes were a major threat to this country's security. I am sure that he is right, but if we are to do something about instability and ethnic disputes in areas such as the Mediterranean, it is time to question the relevance of nuclear weapons in dealing with such a threat. If we have to make choices based on priorities, surely it is time to ask whether it would be better to spend money on aircraft and ships to get our armed forces to the Mediterranean to deal with disputes and bring peace to that troubled region rather than to spend it on nuclear weapons. It is quite reasonable to ask such questions about priorities within the constraints of a defence budget. Again, I should welcome some clarification from Ministers on that important point.

5.58 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid–Sussex): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak. I warmly welcome the new Minister for the Armed Forces to the Dispatch Box for the first time. I am sure that he will enjoy the job every bit as much as I did—indeed, I am green with envy at the idea that he should hold that post. I am grateful for his kind words about me in the past. I also welcome the Secretary of State and congratulate him on an assured start at the Dispatch Box yesterday.

I pay a brief tribute to the previous Chief of the Defence Staff, Field-Marshal Sir Peter Inge, with whom I had the honour to serve and who left the Ministry of Defence in May. He was a very distinguished CDS at an extremely difficult time. I welcome the new Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Charles Guthrie, who has made a confident and assured start. I am sure that he will do a good job.

Since I stopped being the Minister for the Armed Forces—a job which I miss every day—I have been reflecting on why our armed forces command such tremendous respect and affection in this country. Indeed, their standing has increased during the summer. We all have our own theories about that. Undoubtedly, the past triumphs of the Falklands, Bosnia and the Gulf have a great deal to do with it, but I believe that the issue goes further than that. The public have come to see the British forces as highly professional, versatile, can-do organisations whose people are fiercely proud to be associated with them and are determined to give their best.

The services elicit profound admiration because of their strong emphasis on the importance of training, the priority that they place on the interests and welfare of individuals, their relentless pursuit of all that is truly excellent in life and their continual willingness—even appetite—to update, upgrade and modernise their methods of operation. There is no scope for a hideous, new Labour, modernising project.

There were some matters of great concern to me when I left the Ministry of Defence, which I should like to talk about briefly. I remain extremely anxious—as I know the Minister is—about the recruitment difficulties faced by the services in general, and the Army in particular. We are fishing in a pretty small pool for men and women of considerable courage, fortitude, determination and strength of character, with the versatility to turn their hands to anything. Such people are not easily found. When they are found, they must not be wasted.

My next great concern is the increasing difficulty that the services are having in doing their business as more and more restrictions and regulations on issues such as health and safety at work are forced down their throats. The consequences will soon show. With all those rules and regulations and the introduction of longer-range, more lethal and more mobile weaponry and equipment, it is becoming increasingly difficult to carry out realistic military training. We must overcome that, because only through the full rigour of military training and careful preparation for war will our services be able to undertake the tasks expected of them.

My next concern is how the services are coping under the microscope of hysterical media attention. With the full range of the magic hypocrisy at their command, the press pretend to adore the services, but rejoice in every opportunity to shaft them, sometimes very seriously, when things go wrong. Things do go wrong, of course, but such events are only truly shocking in military life because they happen rarely.

My greatest anxiety is the challenge that we all face in convincing the general public of the need to devote substantial sums of money to defence. The Government have the important task of continually reminding the nation of the reasons why we need strong, highly trained and well-equipped forces. That is not an easy task for a Government who include many pacifists and past and present activists of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, who care nothing for defence and despise most of the qualities that make our armed forces unique.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) for his excellent speech. Ministers have already discovered, as we did, that the Treasury is wholly unconcerned with the capabilities of our armed forces. Ministers must learn that the Treasury is their enemy and must be fought accordingly for every inch of ground. The other major problem that they will have with the Treasury is its profound ignorance of defence matters and all that goes with them. It was always my considered opinion, when working at the Ministry of Defence, that those at the Treasury worked for the Russians. Nothing has since persuaded me that I am wrong.

There is little scope for a substantial reordering of priorities in a strategic defence review, or any other major reduction in our core commitment. I very much hope that it will be a serious and, above all, credible exercise. If new thinking emerges, we shall need to study it carefully.

Past and present commitments were never the result of a honey-eyed view of Britain's role in the world. The unmistakeable truth is that we are one of the world's greatest trading nations. Our exports account for approximately a quarter of our gross domestic product. Of all the European Union members, Britain is by far the biggest investor overseas. We have a vital interest in ensuring a stable environment in which to trade and do business. I hope that the strategic defence review will point the way to greater flexibility in the way in which we deploy our defence assets and, possibly, greater realism about the scope of our capabilities. If it is a genuine review, it will make the military more open and honest about where the problems lie and what is achievable. Operational audit must continue to play a big part in such assessments. If it enables us to get away from the self-defeating trickery of double, and sometimes even triple, hatting, it will serve a good purpose and I shall support it. Clearing away some of the smoke and mirrors is not a bad ambition and we should support it.

I wholly agree with the point made by the Secretary of State yesterday about the use of the military in furthering British foreign policy objectives. I hope that the Foreign Office is making a positive contribution to the strategic defence review, but I must warn the Minister that there will continue to be problems with the Foreign Office over military matters. Those in the generation who served in the Army through national service or as regular soldiers are coming to the end of their careers. The instinctive understanding of matters military between the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence is waning. I hope that the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence will get together to ensure that there is a constant exchange of officials at all levels between the two Departments, so that clear understandings remain. I always wanted more Foreign Office officials on the commitments staff, and the Foreign Office could clearly benefit from having more service men and women on attachment to it.

If the Foreign Office has done its stuff, it will acknowledge that the armed forces are a glittering, golden asset for the promotion of our interests abroad. We need to make sure that we have the full array of places at all the military colleges. I did all that I could to encourage the staff college, in particular, to make more places available. That will be difficult as the joint services college comes on stream. The ties thus created are of profound value to foreign students and to us. I hope that the wider use of military training overseas will be addressed in the review as a critical issue.

When I was Minister for the Armed Forces, it was my great pleasure to travel extensively in the middle east and Europe. I was always greatly struck by the extraordinary regard and respect for the services that those countries had. Bahrain is a good case in point. The crown prince of Bahrain and I did our officer cadet training together and jointly shared the horrors of Mons officer cadet school 30 years ago. Many other Bahrain service men have done

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a great deal of training in our country. The military ties that bind us are strong. The Minister for Defence Procurement will chair joint defence talks with Bahrain in November. I hope that we shall do all that we can to further our overseas links, because they make our life much easier abroad and they are an important and impressive way of promoting British foreign policy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order.

6.8 pm

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech in this defence debate. I shall begin with a few words about the former Member of Parliament for Crawley, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames). He brings colour to the House, and he is a jolly and courteous character. As we have just heard, he is an honest man and I wish him well in his new constituency.

It gives me great pleasure to tell the House a little bit about my constituency. Crawley is a wonderful town and I believe that it is the best of the new towns, although, like me, it is getting on a bit. This year, we are celebrating our 50th birthday with a variety of events throughout the year.

Back in its early years, Crawley attracted the pioneers from London—people such as my parents who wanted to raise a family in a house with a garden and to work close by. Crawley has now grown to a population of almost 100,000, but we still have lots of open spaces, sports facilities and cultural facilities second to none. Only last week, the Minister for Sport opened our new football stadium and he was warmly welcomed by the town. Crawley is a good place in which to live.

Even in the early days, politicians understood that families need good-quality housing with gardens and they resisted high-rise buildings, for which we have a lot to thank them today. For most of this time, Crawley has had a fine Labour council which has always been guided by sound principles of good financial management and has always insisted on the very best facilities and services. In turn, the council has been rewarded by the support of the town.

The wise and principled leadership of Alf Pegler, known as "Mr. Crawley", was tragically ended last year by his death. I can only say how sad I am that he died before his dream of a new Labour Government came true. His work goes on in Crawley and it will not be forgotten.

Crawley is a very lively town, with the majority of economic activity in Sussex. We have Gatwick, a major international airport which now handles 25 million passengers and is expected to handle 40 million passengers on a single runway—an enormous technological feat. It takes a lot of co-operation by all involved to cope with such a demanding resident as an international airport. We work together to reduce aircraft noise and we absorb 32,000 workers on and off the airport, with all the special challenges of having such an exciting activity within the constituency and the influences that that has on the economy.

The House may remember the "boom town to gloom town" national headlines about Crawley in the late 1980s. I am glad that this Government are tackling head-on boom-bust economics and that they are facing issues of training and education so that we are equipped in Crawley to take on the fantastic job opportunities there.

Many companies are involved in our town, some of which are involved in the defence industry, mainly in simulation and communications equipment. These companies which, incidentally, always said to me on visits before the election that they had thrived and prospered under previous Labour Governments, provide the very best in the world and compete with the best in the world. They provide our forces with the new technologies they so desperately need to play their part not only in defending the realm, but in peacekeeping, the early detection of conflict, fighting crime and dealing with natural disasters.

We must have up-to-date forces who are able to take on the many different roles asked of them. The strategic defence review should properly take account of those differing roles and we should not allow our forces to be overstretched and under-equipped. I believe that the review is taking proper account of those factors.

What the Prime Minister said to the new Labour conference earlier this month about the United Kingdom must surely be true of our armed forces. He said:

> "We can never be the biggest, we may never be the mightiest but we can be the best."

With being the best in every sense of the word goes a determination to be fair and to treat those in our armed forces decently. That is why I shall devote the rest of the time allowed me to the plight of those suffering from what we have come to know as Gulf war syndrome.

During the previous Parliament, United Kingdom Gulf war veterans felt that they were being ignored and that their condition was not taken seriously. There is, however, no doubt that they are ill. Many are suffering a great range of symptoms, families are breaking up under the strain and people are becoming sicker and sicker. During the previous Parliament, sufferers felt that they were no nearer the truth. People who, before the Gulf conflict, were fit and well are now reduced to shadows of their former selves. We have a duty to do our utmost to understand why this has happened. Why has it happened to United Kingdom troops and to United States troops, but not to French troops? We must have some answers.

Much of the work undertaken by eminent epidemiologists was rubbished by some during the previous Parliament. It is now time to work in complete co-operation with other nations involved in the Gulf war and to pull together all the information and studies. Every aspect of life before and during the conflict, such as diet, levels of stress, types of clothing worn, and chemical and inoculation exposure, needs to be included. We must also collate successful treatments from GPs caring for veterans, and establish efficacy and good practice for care. It is vital that this information is shared between all agencies.

There is a need for the utmost urgency and our Minister for the Armed Forces has made an excellent start. I believe that he has a real understanding of the issue. The Ministry of Defence published a document in early July, entitled "Gulf Veterans Illness—a new beginning", which offered hope to hundreds of veterans. Funding for research has doubled and, in July, the Minister for the Armed Forces met veterans once again. The Defence Select Committee quickly resumed its work in the new

Parliament by questioning the Minister on the issue. He had a superb grasp of it and, with the publication of the new report today, we are making real progress.

The search for answers is to be stepped up. Fairness is the watchword for the new Labour Government and our record in six short months has borne this out. People are suffering long-term illnesses that they could not reasonably expect. Our mission in the House must be clear—to ensure that the nation can have confidence that the very best efforts are being made to find answers, not only for justice for the veterans, but for the prevention of such suffering again. We can now have that confidence.

6.16 pm

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) on a splendid maiden speech. I am sure that her sentiments about the victims of Gulf war syndrome will be echoed around the Chamber and around the nation. Justice for them and for their dependants is long overdue.

I also take this opportunity to pass on the good wishes of many of the service men whom I represent in Portsmouth, and of those who live in Hampshire, to the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) for his efforts to get a fair deal and greater understanding of Ministry of Defence problems. I thank him for his efforts on their behalf.

I also congratulate the Ministry of Defence team on its performance at Defence Question Time. It was certainly the most enjoyable Question Time in my short time in the House in this Parliament and in my previous time in the House. Ministers' responses were the most positive that I have heard for a very long time.

We are, however, talking about a review of our defence capabilities. When the Minister for the Armed Forces introduced the debate, he said that the review would be policy led and not resource driven, but he did not go on to talk about what would happen if the policy was driven by a lack of resources and reversed its aims. Listening carefully to what the Minister said and to what the Secretary of State said in his excellent speech yesterday, we heard them talk about the 29 per cent. less expenditure and the 100,000 fewer personnel available to the armed forces. What they did not say was that resources would be made available to secure the strategic defence of the nation if the review suggested greater commitments than we have at present.

We have had no clear commitment that there will be no reduction in expenditure. We need cast-iron guarantees because otherwise the defence review is a meaningless exercise. Many who have spoken in the debate have rightly celebrated the quality of our armed forces and I also pay tribute to the many men and women I have met during my time representing in politics the city of Portsmouth and the county of Hampshire. I know from travelling around Europe and elsewhere of the high esteem in which our armed forces are held, whether they are members of the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force, the Army or the Royal Marines who have a splendid reputation wherever they serve because of their tough role on behalf of the community.

Recently, I visited eastern Europe, where the contribution of the British Army was greeted with widespread admiration and support. Nobody had anything but a good word for the performance of our troops in Bosnia and the way in which they behaved, handled problems and developed the technique of responding to difficult circumstances in many different parts of the world.

We also need to pay tribute to our reserve forces in the Territorial Army, the RAF and the Navy. They should be considered to be a national asset. They are flexible, available and we can count on them. We need to understand that they play a continuing and vital role in the defence of the nation and share the responsibility of our defence capabilities.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) pointed out yesterday the many deficiencies in the starting point for today's debate on defence capabilities. He talked about the lack of foreign policy objectives and the fact that we still have not clearly established our priorities.

Many hon. Members have rightly and traditionally used the debate to raise constituency matters. The right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) and others spoke about the Royal Ordnance explosives factory. Let me pass on to the House the support for his campaign and that of others who wish that resource to be retained of my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and my hon. Friends the Members for Taunton (Mrs. Ballard) and for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). They are committed to that cause and support the need to maintain an explosives production unit in the United Kingdom. We should not make ourselves vulnerable by allowing a bad decision to be taken.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) who made a thoughtful speech yesterday. He spoke about the worthwhile Astor project. However, the issue is not quite as straightforward as it appeared from his presentation. I represent many people who work for Lockheed Martin, which is based in the city of Portsmouth. That company and its work force have assembled a rich cocktail of expertise and commitment to making the project work. It could be a real asset for the defence community of the nation. I would not want any Minister to rush headlong into a decision without considering what was available.

As I represent the home of the Royal Navy, it would be wrong of me not to mention the city of Portsmouth and its commitment to the Royal Navy. The local newspaper, the *Portsmouth News*, has recently been running a petition, which I am delighted to say the Secretary of State has agreed to receive in a few weeks' time. Signatures were not collected door to door, so people had to make the effort to go and sign the petition. It was signed by thousands of people and it concerns the very subject that the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex spoke about—getting people to realise that we get nothing for nothing and defence has to be paid for. It urges the Government to provide resources to give the Navy the right capabilities to fulfil what the nation expects of it. Many people in Portsmouth have witnessed at first hand the run down of the Royal Navy which has affected civilian jobs as well as the service personnel who go to sea on our behalf. It is important that the Government take seriously issues such as those raised by the *Portsmouth News*. The people of that city have responded magnificently in support of our armed forces.

What are the armed forces for? Many hon. Members have challenged the Minister to explain that. Those who go to the cinema regularly will have seen the

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advertisement that shows how our armed forces help such laudable causes as famine relief, clearing up after earthquakes and other natural disasters and supporting communities affected by them.

Last week, I heard the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office tell the Oxford Research Group that he wanted the armed forces to do more to combat the threat of drugs particularly in the Caribbean. For the first time, a Foreign Office Minister had said that the review had a distinct responsibility to produce some solutions that would give greater flexibility for our armed forces to be used in the defence of communities against drug addiction. However, there was no announcement in the House. We heard nothing from the Foreign Secretary or the Secretary of State for Defence about what the policy guidelines should be.

The two-day debate on defence policy is a bit of a hit and miss. Is it meant to be suggestion box days where we put all our proposals in a hat in the hope that someone will pick them up and run with them? We have not been given sufficient information to make the review the substantial exercise that is required to take our armed forces into the next decade with any degree of surety about where they will be in 10 years' time.

Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting Gibraltar with other hon. Members. The strategic necessity of that base is clear. We need to consider it in connection with the threats that were discussed yesterday and have been well documented. The base at Gibraltar and the two sovereign bases in Cyprus are key issues in the long-term defence of the nation, yet no Foreign Office statement has been made.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Defence was challenged to name the enemy. I supported him whole-heartedly when he talked us through an eloquent presentation on where he saw potential enemies. I urge any hon. Members who have not yet done so to read the document recently produced by the North Atlantic Assembly on the state of Russian forces. It describes a horror story waiting to happen—in some cases, it has already happened—posing threats across eastern Europe and beyond. There is the opportunity for someone to go out of control. We need a quick response to the real threat resulting from the collapse of the old Soviet armed forces. How right the Secretary of State was to make that issue plain and simple to understand in the House.

The review should have started to address some of the policies that the Ministry of Defence has recently put into practice, such as the number of agencies that have been set up. I read with interest questions that were asked by hon. Members towards the end of the previous Parliament concerning the role of those agencies. There has been no proper evaluation of whether any of the targets set are capable of being achieved or whether the setting up of 40 or more agencies within the Ministry of Defence has produced real value for money. The review should have been given the opportunity to examine their role and the way in which they are to be developed over the coming years in the defence of our nation.

Let me touch on an issue that many hon. Members have mentioned. We have heard a great deal about procurement—pieces of metal, fabric, computers and everything else that we need for the defence of our nation. Some hon. Members have spoken about the other important commodity that was mentioned by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key)—

Mr. Viggers: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Are the clocks working?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman might be referring to the 10-minute limit on speeches, which does not apply to Front-Bench Members.

Mr. Hancock: I am grateful for that response, Mr. Deputy Speaker, although I am sure that it comes as a disappointment to the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers).

Mr. Godman: That is a shame.

Mr. Hancock: I am sure that the hon. Member for Gosport is heartened by the support of the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman). I shall do my best to speed up so that other hon. Members have the opportunity to speak.

Let me talk about the courage, dedication and loyalty of the armed forces—their human side. The immediate concern must be the retention and recruitment of Army personnel. Those of us who represent constituencies where the military are based will hear first-hand accounts of the problems that they face almost every day and the issues that confront their families.

Yesterday, we heard some comments about Major Joyce and his role in trying to expose some of those deficiencies. One of my constituents who has two children in the armed forces wrote to the *Daily Mail* setting out her defence of Major Joyce's position. She did so using some of the very words that he had used. She put them into the context of her family. Her daughter, who wanted to be promoted to sergeant and was subject to a promotion review, became disillusioned when she was told by a senior Army officer in Germany that he did not believe that there was a place in the Army for women. After serving for a considerable time, my constituent's son-in-law recently left the Army because he had become extremely disillusioned and disappointed at the way in which the Army had responded to various needs.

We need to take seriously the sort of suggestions that Major Joyce attempted to make. How wrong the Secretary of State was to say yesterday that whether a court martial was the end of the story was simply an Army matter. That was not a satisfactory response. Major Joyce was making a stand which many of his fellow members of the armed forces would have liked to have made. Ministers have a right and a duty to respond to it.

Mr. Soames: Rubbish.

Mr. Hancock: Although I am sure that that point comes as a disappointment to the hon. Gentleman, I assure him that, from talking to members of the armed forces in Hampshire, there is a considerable amount of support for the stance that Major Joyce took.

In her maiden speech, the hon. Member for Crawley referred to Gulf war veterans and their problems. I ask the Minister to consider seriously the civilians who went to the Gulf in the service of the Crown who, unlike in the Falklands war, were not enlisted. They suffered the symptoms of Gulf war syndrome, too.

I have constituents—sadly no longer working—who served on ships in the NAAFI. Service personnel on those ships will benefit from any review and are entitled to other benefits that are already available about which the Minister talked. Many civilians who served the three services are not being given the option of being included. Sadly, many of them have had a very swift brush off from the MoD.

What about the Chinese laundry men who worked on Her Majesty's ships who, with a cavalier sweep, have been dismissed? *[Laughter.]*

Mr. McWilliam: I hope that Opposition Members who are laughing have the opportunity to visit the war memorial at Fitzroy in the Falklands to see the names in Chinese of the Chinese laundry men who were killed unnecessarily in that place.

Mr. Hancock: I represent 40 of the 80 chinese laundry men who currently work for the Royal Navy—and I am proud to do so. Many of them wear three or four medals on their chests in honour of the service that they have given the nation. Many of them feel very bitter about the way in which, sadly, they have been dismissed as if they are no longer important since the MoD has taken on contractors who would rather employ retired Gurkha soldiers or others. If we are to care for our service personnel, we need to care for all the service family.

Asbestos victims—civilian and military—have been talked about many times in the House. Over a long period—I am not directing these comments at current Ministers—cases of human misery and suffering have arisen. Lives have been tragically cut short or ruined in the service of this country. We have heard the case of nuclear test veterans. I hope that in his winding-up speech the Minister will, as promised, comment about the way in which we can address their problems. For how long was their case ignored or treated with disdain in the House?

I cannot conceive that it is possible for senior or middle-ranking officers and NCOs not to know of the bullying that goes on. It is impossible in some close-knit units not to know what is going on. Yet they seem totally amazed when such stories start to emerge. We hear disclaimers that the incident is isolated. There are too many such incidents for that to be so. Bullying is a real problem—as is racism and the apparent distaste among senior officers and others for people who are continuously questioned about their sexual preferences. If we are trying to create an environment in which the public are encouraged to join our armed forces, such behaviour is totally wrong.

It was interesting to read today on the front page of *The Times* an article entitled:

> "Army wants to recruit homeless and jobless".

The Army is going to homeless hostels in the north-east to recruit soldiers. It is already in night clubs. It will not be long, if we are not careful, before the welfare-to-work programme will—possibly—carry an obligation that one has to consider military service. Perhaps we are not too far from new-style press gangs being brought into operation to persuade people to join the armed services. If we really want to encourage people to join the armed forces, we have to make the services transparent. They have to be seen to be fair and seen to respond to the promotion needs of men and women. We need to be fair to recruits and look after their families, especially when they have problems in the armed forces.

I had hoped that this two-day debate would give Ministers enough to think about to prompt them to say that there are too many unanswered questions. I am delighted that they are going to take a little longer to come back with answers to the review. I hope that they think long and hard about the many points that have been made in the debate and the 500 or more comments that they have received. This issue is far too important to be pushed aside. As the Minister said, it comes back to whether it is policy led or resource driven. If resources are not available, some of the commitments will go, some of the kit that is needed will not be provided, some of the personnel needed will not be trained and some of our obligations will not be fulfilled. That would be a disaster for this nation. Hon. Members should fight tooth and nail against it.

6.35 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) on her first speech in the House. She graphically outlined the consequences for both sides of the conflict of so-called "clean wars" such as the Gulf war. The onset of Gulf war syndrome is one more product of the use of chemicals in any form in war by either side. Perhaps more consideration should have been given to the arming of Iraq in the early 1980s, which was a major component in the provocation of the Gulf war.

I welcome the fact that the Government are undertaking a review of the country's defence strategy, and particularly welcome the introductory remarks in the Ministry of Defence's paper on the defence review in which it is stated that the review is foreign-policy led. The first statement of the new Foreign Secretary after the election was on the human rights dimension in foreign policy. I hope that that will run through all aspects of our defence policy, including the defence industry and the question of arm sales.

This country spends well over £20 billion a year on armaments of one form or another. We spend considerably more on defence than any other European country—apart from Greece and Turkey—as a proportion of total Government spending. Indeed, if we reduced our defence expenditure to the European average of about 2.2 per cent., there would be an overall saving of £6 billion a year. Although that would not all be realised immediately—it never could be—it could be realised over a longer period.

I was pleased that, in his opening remarks yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State drew attention to the question of the establishment of a defence diversification agency and pointed out that an announcement is due to be made—presumably when the conclusions of the defence review are put forward. I look forward to that. Clearly, if we are to harness the undoubted skills of people in the defence industry, they should not be thrown on the scrap heap of unemployment. As hon. Members who represent areas with considerable naval, Army, Air Force or defence-related ship-building

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interests will know, those highly skilled workers ought to be given something more socially useful to do. That is surely at the heart of the question of cutting defence expenditure: not wasting the skills but putting them to some good use. Goodness knows, there are enough needs around the world to benefit from such good use. I am especially pleased that the Secretary of State announced yesterday that he will publish all the submissions to the defence review, if the contributors wish that to be done. That means that I do not need to send Opposition Members a copy of my lengthy submission, because they will be able to read it in the Library. I am sure that some of them will wish to do so and, in fact, some of them are nodding sagely.

We face issues that confront the entire planet and that is the context in which we should undertake the defence review. We live in a world with an ever-growing gap between the richest and the poorest, with the systematic and constant abuse of human rights in many areas, and with a serious threat of environmental destruction and disaster. The ghastly cloud that has hung over Indonesia, Singapore and other parts of south-east Asia should be a warning to us all that there are limits to growth and to what we can do to the environment. We should recognise that many military conflicts around the world have roots in poverty, human rights abuses and the fight for natural resources. The Gulf war was really about oil, and the background to the Falklands conflict also contained an oil dimension.

We should look to a world in which we can reduce the possibilities of conflict and the amount of the world's resources expended on military matters. We should concentrate on the alleviation of poverty, as the Prime Minister said this afternoon in his report on the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Edinburgh. The defence review could give us the chance to do so.

It is worrying that in the aftermath of the cold war—with all the attendant problems in central Europe and the former Soviet republics, including enormous ethnic tensions and the war in Chechnya—one of the proposals advanced by the western nations, including Britain and the United States, is the expansion of NATO to embrace several central European countries. It is hard to believe that in five years' time the Polish people will be happy to see their defence expenditure double while schools close—because there is no money to keep them open—and welfare and hospital services are cut.

I notice that American arms manufacturers expect to sell many F16s and other aircraft to Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary and to undertake joint military manoeuvres with the Ukraine. If that is not a recipe for future conflict, I do not know what is. To expand NATO to the borders of Russia will create great political pressures in that country to expand military expenditure and research to deal with the perceived threat of NATO expansion.

We should concentrate on disarmament and demilitarisation, instead of the militarisation of the whole of central Europe and the conflicts that will result. Otherwise, a big bill will have to be paid by the people of central Europe and by taxpayers in Britain and the United States to fund rearmament programmes.

As well as thinking seriously about the possible results of NATO expansion, we must address the consequences of the arms sales programme that has been conducted in the past. In the 1980s, many Labour Members criticised the regime in Iraq and the policy of selling arms and equipment that could be used for the manufacturing of arms to the Ba'athist regime. We were told that our criticisms were nonsense and that Britain's economic interests came first. What happened? A super-armed regime systematically abused the human rights of its people and, eventually, provoked an enormous military conflict. That should have been a lesson to us, but the sale of arms to Turkey continues, despite the attack on the Kurdish people, as do arms sales to Indonesia.

I do not have much time left in which to make two further points. This debate gives us another opportunity to reconsider the question of the holding and maintaining of nuclear weapons by Britain. There is a fundamental moral case that we should not hold any nuclear weapons. I have always held that view and I always will. It is inconceivable that we should hold weapons that threaten the very existence of the planet. Nuclear weapons have not brought security or peace: they have meant the abuse of human rights, the invasion of civil rights and untold damage to this planet. Mordecai Vanunu tried to blow the whistle on the Israeli military experiment and he has been in solitary confinement for more than a decade. In his name and those of people like him, who have campaigned systematically for peace, we should reassess our possession of nuclear weapons and their cost.

The real cost of nuclear weapons has been systematically hidden by the Ministry of Defence and I suspect that it is £1.5 billion a year. However, the cost is not the real issue. We should address the principle involved. In a world in which there is no obvious enemy or threat to this country, why on earth do we have those weapons, other than to threaten people who may challenge our economic interests? Public opinion polls suggest that 59 per cent. of the United Kingdom population would feel more secure without nuclear weapons. We should, on this occasion, listen to public opinion.

Oxfam, which has long campaigned for the elimination of poverty in the world, has produced an interesting booklet called "A Safer Future: Reducing the Human Cost of War". It lists some of the causes of conflict and I shall mention four:

> "deep ethnic or religious divisions . . . intense inequality and competition over the means to earn a living . . . no democratic rule of law or institutional framework to allow peaceful change . . . a ready supply of small arms and ammunition."

Conflicts abound around the world, fuelled by inequality and the profiteering of arms manufacturers. The defence review gives us an opportunity to reassess our defence commitment to try to contribute to a safer, more sustainable world. The expansion of NATO and the increase in military expenditure in central Europe and other places can only increase the danger of serious conflict. It is time to reassess those issues and to enter the next century with a more peaceful intent than we have managed to achieve this century.

6.45 pm

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak, and I wish to add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Crawley

(Laura Moffatt) on an excellent maiden speech. She clearly had a much easier time than I did in framing the appropriate compliments to her predecessor.

Am I alone, because I do not represent a party, in believing that we should not play party politics with the defence of the realm? I made it my objective when I became, almost by accident, a Member of Parliament to make only short speeches on subjects that I knew something about. I had the privilege of serving in uniform with the 7th Armoured Division in the Gulf and, out of uniform, alongside British troops in Bosnia. I know from both experiences that we have the best little Army in the world. I know, too, that unless it changes at least as fast as circumstances are changing, it will no longer be the best little Army in the world. We have to go back to first principles and renew them. I shall make some brief suggestions.

I have argued in my previous life, as well as this one, that any defence review must take as a starting point the welfare of service families. That issue is not ancillary to the enterprise: it is central. It is good to know that the Secretary of State has heard about overstretch directly from service men in Split. I can add more. I know of units that were sent on almost back-to-back, six-month unaccompanied tours in Bosnia. It was not uncommon for a battalion's casualties to include not only the dead and wounded—and there were such casualties, because the soldiers risked their lives to save lives—but 10 per cent. and more of its marriages. Soldiers would return to find that they no longer had a functioning home. They had gained a medal and lost a marriage. What kind of a deal is that?

Let us match commitments to resources and resources to commitments in the defence review. We should change our attitudes to operations and active service, which tend to be thought of as a cycle. Troops train for the operation, carry out the operation—whether fighting a war, or peacekeeping and enforcement—and the cycle resumes. In fact, the process is a continuum, involving pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict.

We should not forget the lessons that have been learned in Bosnia and Rwanda about pre-emptive deployment. A pre-emptive UN deployment prevented war in Macedonia and, in my judgment, saved thousands of lives. Kofi Annan believes that a pre-emptive deployment of one armoured brigade in Rwanda at the beginning of the emergency would have held off genocide and saved hundreds of thousands of lives. One does not have to be a super-power to field an armoured brigade.

We must welcome the Government's initiative on mine clearance. A war does not end with a ceasefire or a peace agreement, and mines will blow up for generations and kill and wound children yet unborn. I can think of no better use of our taxpayers' money than that our soldiers should continue to train children in many countries in the identification of mines.

Finally, I wish to refer to rank and privilege—not the functions of rank, but its privilege—and the gap that exists, certainly in the Army, between officers and other ranks. We are privileged to have listening to this debate my friend Major Eric Joyce, a soldier of distinction who has risked his career and now faces—

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to refer to Strangers during a debate in the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): It is not strictly in order, and I advise the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) not to do so.

Mr. Bell: I stand corrected. Major Joyce faces a court martial or an administrative dismissal, or he may have to resign. I hope that Ministers will make a distinction between the disciplinary action being taken and the merit of his ideas. Here is just one—that a sergeant should find a fast-track promotional route into the Royal Military academy at Sandhurst which, at the moment, he cannot do four years after signing up. That route is closed. The proportion of soldiers who are now officer cadets at Sandhurst is 0.2 per cent. For me, that is an indictment of the rigidity of the present system and we must surely change it.

We live in revolutionary times. Great changes are taking place in society. Some of us find ourselves as Members of this House because of those revolutionary changes. We know that the Army will have to change, and this is the appropriate time to be looking for the appropriate ways in which it should change so that it can continue to be the best little Army in the world. One thing we know for sure—what it cannot do is mark time.

6.51 pm

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): It is a significant privilege to follow the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) and, for the first time in 20 years in this House, I can say that I do not disagree with a word that an hon. Member sitting opposite me has said.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) on an excellent maiden speech, and I look forward to working closely with her on the Defence Committee. In particular, her medical expertise will be of great benefit to the Committee as we study Gulf war syndrome. I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate also the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who is on the Opposition Front Bench. I hope that he continues to do so for a long time, and I shall miss his company on the Select Committee, at both the evidence sessions and our informal evenings when we are away. I should add to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley that on many occasions—although not today—the most colourful thing about her predecessor was his socks.

I wish to say a few words about our armed forces. I have served on the Select Committee and as a defence Whip, and I have been associated with the armed forces since I was chairman of the Edinburgh military tattoo policy committee. I have seen our armed forces in the Gulf, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Turkey and northern Iraq. I am utterly at a loss to explain how they can continue to display such professionalism and commitment, to be so effective and to show such compassion and humanity under the difficult circumstances in which they find themselves, given the pressures to which they have been subjected in the past 15 years.

If I had suggested when I was first elected to the House that we cut our armed forces by a half of what the previous Government did, I would have been subjected to the most terrible ridicule. The previous Government cut our armed

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forces by more than was called for by the most lunatic resolution passed by conference in the old days of the Labour party—and, believe me, there were some lunatic ones.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) has just left the Chamber. I respect his pacifism, but I stood for election on the Labour party manifesto. We all stood for election on that manifesto, but it was not the one for which my hon. Friend was arguing. I shall always protect his right to be a pacifist, but I hope that no Opposition Member is under the impression that the majority of Labour Members are pacifists—we are not.

I wish to express my gratitude to the people who have made the ammunition, guns, aircraft, uniforms, boots, tents and everything else that our armed forces have needed. If it were not for the defence manufacturing industries, we would not have succeeded in the Falklands and we certainly would not have succeeded in the Gulf.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I am delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman has repudiated pacifism. Has he also repudiated his membership of the parliamentary Labour party Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament group between 1982 and 1986?

Mr. McWilliam: It seems to me that 1986 is a long time ago. When I joined the CND, it was multilateralist and I could not get it to change, which is why I left. I will accept no more interruptions. If that is the standard I can expect, it would not be worth while.

If the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) reads the joint report of the Trade and Industry Committee and the Defence Committee, published during the previous Parliament, he might gain more insight into what we ought to be doing in terms of defence procurement. I am deeply worried by the proposal to form a joint company between Royal Ordnance and SNPE of France. Not that long ago—I am sorry to say—the previous Government gave away our ability to manufacture FH70 ammunition for our main field howitzers. The Belgian company that ended up with the contract refused to supply 155 mm ammunition to our forces in the Gulf. We cannot and must not allow the SNPE-Royal Ordnance joint company to go ahead, and we must continue to have the ability to manufacture military explosives in this country.

A review must address overstretch. Nights away from home, extended tour intervals and shortened periods between tour intervals are having a distinct effect on the morale of our armed forces. We must do something about that. The previous Government cut and cut and let the situation worsen without any thought for the consequences. My colleagues on the Select Committee—the majority of whom were Conservatives—felt the same as me and were prepared to produce critical reports. I can assure the House that as a member of the current Defence Committee, I shall act in no way differently from the way in which I acted on the previous Committee.

There are serious problems with procurement projects, particularly where there are high levels of system integration. We have failed in all sorts of areas—from airborne radar aircraft to frigate command and control systems and the tactical weapons system on nuclear submarines—because of one problem. The Ministry of Defence cannot cope with high levels of system integration—which is strange, because our industry certainly can. We have one of the best information technology industries in the world, and it is capable of dealing with contracts with high degrees of sophistication and integration. It is only when the MOD's procurement process gets involved that it goes astray.

I shall give my hon. Friends on the Front Bench a piece of advice that I used to give when I was city treasurer in Edinburgh. I used to say to officials, "If you want to have unplanned works added to a contract, please bring me your proposal together with your resignation—it will save time."

I congratulate the Government on the progress on Gulf war syndrome since the general election. The Select Committee on Defence in the previous Parliament was extremely critical of the then Government for their failure to move and their assertion that the only research that was needed was psychological and, frankly—I blame not the Government but certain individuals—for trying to mislead the Committee as to possible causes. Those who were responsible have either resigned or been disciplined, but I resent the fact that it happened; if it ever happens again, I promise that I, for one, will cause trouble.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the defence medical services, as did my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces. When I visited the defence medical services last year, I was shocked by the demoralisation; by the state that they were in; by the fact that the three services, although it was supposed to be a tri-service system, had different arrangements; and by the discovery that the nearest officer from whom an aircraftman or aircraftwoman could get help would be a surgeon squadron leader or a surgeon group captain, and that often there was no officer they could refer to on their base. The different conditions of service for members of different services doing the same job cause resentment, and that must be dealt with.

I shall now resume my seat before another Conservative Member makes another stupid intervention.

7 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam). I can at least join him in the tribute that he paid to British industry and its contribution to the success of our defence forces.

Those who 10 years ago called on the Government to turn their swords into ploughshares are today queuing up to demand ever more defence expenditure. That is indeed an encouraging sign. The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), who represents the home of the nuclear submarine, declared on 30 May 1987 that Labour would

> "end the madness of our reliance on nuclear weapons",

adding that the

> "arms race has brought us to the brink of total destruction"

and that the Conservatives

> "claim that these weapons of mass destruction make us secure. The truth is that they do not."

Greater joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, and even greater joy if the entire parliamentary Labour party repenteth, with the exception of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn).

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness is now calling for more aircraft carriers, so [illegible] can take great encouragement from that.

Mr. Gray: Constituency interests.

Mr. Howarth: There may be constituency interests there, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is also acting on principle.

The Labour party cannot claim great insight, because even the Russians are going for competitive tendering; the Labour party is not in the avant garde of change. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) said yesterday, it is a tribute to the Conservative party that Labour has been forced over the years to change its posture on defence, and our debate in the past two days is testimony to the fact that we have won the argument that strong defence leads to peace and to freedom.

The Secretary of State said yesterday that we live in a more complex world following the fall of the Berlin wall. We would all agree with that. The certainties of the cold war have been replaced by uncertainties. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) may be interested to know that I was not in the Treasury, but I worked for the Russians. While not in the House, I spent a year working for the Russian aircraft design bureau, Sukhoi, manufacturers of the Su-27 fighter aircraft; and a fascinating time it was.

I met Konstantin Marbachev, the chief designer of the Su-27, arguably one of the most potent aircraft in the world, and asked him, through the interpreter, "If we are all friends, who is the enemy?" He looked up and said, "Mussulmanski." [Hon. Members: "Who?"] Mussulmanski—Islamic fundamentalism. That is only one potential threat. There are others, such as Russia itself, should it implode—we should not take a return to Russian nationalism lightly—and China.

We face a complex and difficult world, and it is important to prepare our armed services not only for humanitarian action but for hostilities. It is right for us to deploy our troops where they can play a humanitarian role, but we should remember what they are there for in the first place: to defend the realm and our interests throughout the world. I fear that the decision to extend the role of women in the armed forces smacks more of political correctness than of a need to deal with a recruitment problem.

The Minister faces a problem, because if we are to prepare for myriad possible eventualities, he will have to retain a nuclear capability and continue to invest in the smart weapons that made all the difference in the Gulf war and kept casualties to a minimum. He will have to invest in air superiority and in the troops who will be able to hold the territory. It is hard to see how all that can be maintained without additional resources. I agree with much of the rhetoric of the new Defence Ministers, and I think that they are men of honour, but they will be judged not by their rhetoric but by their deeds.

Many hon. Members have referred to British Aerospace's proposal to sell its Bridgwater Royal Ordnance factory to a French company, SNPE. The trade unions have produced an interesting briefing on the matter, which says:

> "Unless Government intervenes to protect strategic capacity . . . Britain will, in future, have to depend on France to meet the needs of our armed forces, including in times of crisis."

Ministers face a difficult decision. Sir Dick Evans of British Aerospace has said that the restructuring of defence industries throughout Europe is a vital priority and urged the Government to speed it up. He recognises that there is a political dimension.

The Government will have to grapple with the issue, because they will find it hard to rationalise the industry in Europe—which probably has to be done—without risking the loss of some critical strategic capability, which no one in the House, not even the Liberal Democrats, great federalists though they are, wants to surrender to France. We must look not only to co-operative agreements with our continental partners but to the United States, and France finds that unacceptable.

The Minister will have to deal with the Foresight programme, promoted by the British aerospace industry. He knows that the President of the Board of Trade has given her support to that programme of technological research, which is vital because we are living off yesterday's investment: today's export sales of defence equipment are based on past investment. The Government keep banging on about investment, so perhaps the Minister can tell us what they intend to do about the Foresight programme.

I bitterly resent the imputation that the Conservative Government did not have an ethical defence sales policy. We had a strict licensing regime. Ministers must understand that defence sales enable us to support our allies and to get value for money from production runs that we could not afford if our only marketplace was the United Kingdom. The Government will have to think hard about that. They must stand firm in support of defence sales, which are important to British industry and to the execution of our foreign policy. Saudi Arabia is an ally, and made more strongly an ally by its defence ties with us.

The royal yacht Britannia has a part to play in promoting not only defence sales but all British exports. I am very sorry that it has been dropped. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young)—my former boss, to whom I was parliamentary private secretary—was far too gentle yesterday when he mentioned all the press reports on Sunday 3 August about how the Government were going to reinstate the royal yacht Britannia. The reports were designed to ensure that the Foreign Secretary's adultery with his secretary was driven off the front pages of the newspapers. It is no good the Under-Secretary shaking his head; he knows that that was why it was done.

In the few moments left to me, I wish to raise one or two local matters because defence is a key issue for my constituency. British Aerospace has made much of the need to use the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and tap into its resources. I stress to the Minister that we already have a defence diversification agency in the form of DERA, which employs 2,700 people in Farnborough and 8,000 scientists. It is being used; please continue to use it. When the Secretary of State comes to the centre of mine expertise at Minley, at the Royal School of Military Engineering—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

7.10 pm

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces on their excellent speeches, on their rapid reaction approach to tackling the multitude of problems left to us by the previous Government and on implementing some of the commitments made in our election manifesto. I particularly the welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister today on Gulf veterans and the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt).

After a mere six months of government, we are already undertaking tasks that the previous Government dodged and shied away from not for months but for years. Even Conservative Members spoke in favour of the strategic defence review and said that the previous Government's policies had led to severe overstretch and falling of morale in the armed forces.

Listening to some speeches from the shadow defence team and from Conservative Members, I was reminded of some of the quotes I saw in 206s. For those who are not familiar with them, they are officer fitness reports which are scathing in their comments and decide whether an officer should continue in his role. I shall quote two or three and leave my hon. Friends to decide which ones apply to Conservative Members.

The first says: "This Officer"—or hon. Member—

> "is not so much of a has-been, but more of a definitely won't-be."

The second states:

> "He would be out of his depth in a car park puddle."

I see that the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) appreciates that one.

The third states:

> "Since my last report he has reached rock bottom, and has started to dig."

The fourth quote reminds of the shadow Secretary of State, who spoke about spinning yesterday, and states: "This Officer"—or hon. Member—

> "reminds me very much of a gyroscope—always spinning around at a frantic pace but not really going anywhere."

I see that I have the approval of Conservative Members for introducing fitness reports for the shadow defence team.

Our strategic defence review needs to go back to basics and ask what role Britain wants to play, what sort of military we want in the 21st century, and what are the real and potential threats to our national security and interest. The review gives us an opportunity to shape our future and that of the world we live in. It could be no better timed as we approach the millennium.

I agree with Government and Opposition Members who remarked that defence is often regarded as the least attractive area of Government policy and the prime place to make savings. We can too easily forget that the prime role of a Government is to provide their people with security and freedom. That came across to me forcefully recently when I had the honour of attending a North Atlantic Assembly plenary session in Bucharest. I became aware of how keen Romania and many central and east European countries were to join NATO because they thought that it would provide the security and freedom that they have lacked for so many decades.

The cold war may have ended, but it has been replaced by a more diverse range of security challenges. We must reject an island mentality and continue to recognise that our defence and security interests mean that we should remain in NATO and the United Nations, and support NATO enlargement.

I should like to mention the excellent reports that were prepared for the North Atlantic Assembly by my hon. Friends the Members for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) and for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on "Partnership for Peace" enhancement and on the cost comparisons of NATO enlargement. The Secretary General of NATO made a good point in his speech to the NAA in Bucharest when he said:

> "The costs of enlargement will pale in comparison to the costs we have to pay when peace breaks down like it did in Bosnia."

NATO enlargement means that our forces will continue to be called on to deal with a far more diverse range of security challenges. Their peacekeeping role in Bosnia is essential; they have performed excellently in IFOR and now in the stabilisation force, SFOR. We must debate more fully our involvement in peacekeeping and consider what position we are prepared to take and in what parts of the world we are prepared to operate in that capacity.

NATO should be recognised as having given us the framework for dialogue with Russia, for all the tensions that that creates. I support the Secretary of State in his vision of greater partnership and co-operation.

Despite improvements in Russian control over nuclear material, there is continuing concern about the safety of the Russian nuclear arsenal and the leakage of technology and material to unstable regimes in the middle east and elsewhere. There are also major concerns about the storage and disposal of decommissioned submarines, for example, and their environmental impact. Those considerations should play a part in our strategic defence review.

The force with which I have had the pleasure of dealing most is the Royal Navy, because I undertook the armed forces parliamentary scheme with the Navy. I recommend the AFPS scheme to hon. Members. I hope that the role of the Royal Navy in our future defence interests will be recognised. I urge that we debate fully and consider carefully the future role of the aircraft carrier. Having been on both HMS Invincible and HMS Illustrious during sea war exercises, I have seen the flexibility, range and capability that they offer.

The Minister for the Armed Forces would be surprised if I did not mention the importance of maintaining our shipbuilding and ship refitting skills, particularly at Rosyth dockyard in my constituency. I know that staff at the dockyard eagerly look forward to playing such a role.

I join others in praising and expressing my support for the reserves, especially as Dunfermline is home to one of the best air training corps in the country.

Our defence industry plays a crucial role in providing us with a capability. Unfortunately, I do not have the time to support some of the comments that have been made. I welcome the smart procurement. I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement to examine the savings that can be made in the bureaucracy that still exists in procurement.

I join all hon. Members in praising our armed forces. They make us proud to be citizens of the United Kingdom. I finish by quoting Admiral Collingwood, who said of Trafalgar, but his remark applies to all forces today:

> "When all exert themselves zealously in their country's services, all deserve that their high merits should stand recorded."

It is our task to ensure that our armed forces are able to continue to serve our country with such excellence.

7.21 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The defence review was couched in grand and sweeping terms. In his announcement on 28 May, the Secretary of State said that the review would

> "provide Britain's Armed Forces with a new sense of clarity, coherence and consensus. The review will be foreign policy led . . . the review will look afresh at all aspects of our policy and programmes."

However, events since then have demonstrated the failure of the Government to live up to their promise. I shall demonstrate that the Government's defence policy is defeatist, blinkered, doctrinaire and unimaginative.

In the summer, shortly after their election, the Government found for the first time, not surprisingly, that they faced a funding crisis in the national health service. I say that it was not surprising because the Government kept to the spending targets of the previous Government, but did not allow for inflation so there was a shortfall of some 2.5 per cent. What happened? The Secretary of State for Defence was mugged in Whitehall in broad daylight by the Treasury. The mugger demanded money with menaces. It had a knife and was prepared to cut, as the Treasury always is.

The Secretary of State had a foolproof evasion technique at that point. The Government had announced on 28 May, with all the authority of government, that there would be a fundamental review of defence with no holds barred. However, the Secretary of State did not dispute the matter with the Treasury. He gave in. His response to the threat was, in the immortal words of the Minister for the Armed Forces:

> "One throws £168 million in the basket."

I submit that those words deserve to be carved on a granite plinth and placed outside the Ministry of Defence to record the Minister's first brush with a hostile power.

Dr. Reid: I know that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to mislead the House. If he read the whole quotation, it would say:

> "One takes £246 million. One throws £168 million in the basket. Whatever is left represents what was achieved during the negotiations."—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1997; Vol. 299, c. 678.]

Mr. Viggers: I attended more bilateral meetings in the Treasury when I was a Parliamentary Private Secretary than the Minister or, I suspect, any hon. Member present has. It is possible for Ministers to stand up to the Treasury, which does not divide capital and income. Ministers can take a line. On this occasion, the Ministry of Defence was rolled over. That shows that the role of current Ministers, as we shall see increasingly in the years ahead, is to put a good face on failure.

Dr. Reid *rose—*

Mr. Viggers: I am sorry, I cannot give way again, even to the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have the greatest respect.

So the Government's defence policy is defeatist. It is also blinkered. The Government said that they would

> "look afresh at all aspects of our policy and programmes",

but the review will not examine two aspects. One is Trident. That is correct, because Trident is a unique nuclear deterrent. The second is the Eurofighter, which has a fixed number of 232 purchases. Why Eurofighter? It was initially an air-to-air combat aircraft in the production of which four nations participated. After delays and cost increases, it was redefined to have also a ground attack role with anti-armour missiles and stand-off air-to-surface missiles. Those will inhibit the air-to-air role. One does not need to be a pilot to see that Eurofighter is dull. The Mig 29 Fulcrum aircraft has performed unbelievable feats of aerobatics at air shows in the west for a decade. The Sukhoi 27 Flanker and its derivatives are a generation ahead of Eurofighter in agility, even though they are a whole generation older.

Eurofighter looks what it is—a conventional 1980s air frame with poor stealth characteristics and limited range. It lacks thrust vectoring and it needs afterburners to sustain supersonic flight. At a cost of £15 billion, it will take an enormous amount out of the defence budget, so why is it excluded from the defence review? The answer is that the Labour Government have excluded Eurofighter to protect jobs. As in so many cases, the Labour party is showing its true colours. It believes that defence is a job creation agency. Just when we need flexibility and mobility, we are locked into the old inflexibilities of the cold war. So the defence review is blinkered.

The defence review is also doctrinaire. Despite the promise in his announcement of 28 May, the Secretary of State has taken one more issue out of the review—the opening of more posts to women, which was broadly welcomed by Labour Members. I saw many of them nodding happily yesterday. I wonder how many of those who were nodding had been in a trench, a tank or a spy bunker. Very few hon. Members now have experience in the armed forces, and many also lack experience of the armed forces. It is the duty of those who have experience in the armed forces to point out the stresses, pressures, space constraints and interaction of loyalties in the armed forces and to say that the presence of women will complicate them. I do not take sides on the issue. I should like to discuss it with those in the armed forces and hear their views.

However, if we are to have a fundamental strategic defence review, surely the Government should have had the courtesy to discuss with the House of Commons the opening of posts to women rather than announcing it in the opening speech of the two-day debate. Exactly the same applies to homosexuality in the armed forces. It is a serious issue. I remember the fluent and powerful speech that the current Minister for the Armed Forces made in support of the status quo at the end of the proceedings of the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill, which I chaired.

[Mr. Viggers]

It was a sufficiently important issue to be the subject of a free vote. It concerns me that the issue is also part of the strategic defence review. The fact that the Government have announced that there will be another free vote shows that they are more interested in political correctness than in military efficiency.

The strategic defence review is also unimaginative. It does not deal with the great issues of British foreign policy, our place in the world and how we can make ourselves and others more secure. As the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) reported, countries in central and eastern Europe are racked with internal and external problems. How can we help them? They are hopeful, fearful and very uncertain. Where is the foreign policy framework within which the strategic defence review will take place?

Important developments are taking place in foreign affairs. NATO is expanding to take in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Other countries are making forceful demands for further expansion. I should like to see the "Partnership for Peace" expanded, rather than NATO.

We should consider what encouragement we can give through the Ministry of Defence to countries in central and eastern Europe, many of which are uniquely geared to the military-industrial combines that produced weapons in the past. In removing those combines, we remove from those countries an important part of their industry. Could not the Government produce a new initiative on arms procurement, to use the skills of companies such as Sukhoi, and Antonov in Kiev, which I visited recently? Antonov's design centre has produced the Antonov 70, which has many of the characteristics that we need for our heavy lift capability. Why are there no initiatives with other European states, especially those that most need help?

Looking outside Europe, why was the Secretary of State so vague about our involvement outside the NATO area? Would not this debate have been an ideal opportunity to put forward new ideas for discussion? Do the Government have a view on the United Nations developing its own international military staff? Do the Government think that they could contribute more to peacekeeping, perhaps by promoting the idea of a staff college for peacekeeping here in the United Kingdom, as we have unique qualifications owing to our special information on civil defence and aids to civil power?

We have heard little new in the debate. The so-called review is unimaginative and a missed opportunity. Of course, we know why the two-day debate has been held now. The Select Committee on Defence is always pleading for the two-day debate on defence to be brought forward. It has been brought forward now because Ministers can simply reply to every question by saying that everything is under review. I hope that Ministers have enjoyed their time in office so far, as that enjoyment will not last. The next time that we see them here they will have to come and give us the bad news.

7.30 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): It may be of some help to the House if I put it on the record that I no longer serve on the Select Committee on Defence. That is a source of some disappointment to me, but I have been mollified to some degree as I have been elected vice-chairman of the defence and security committee—the main committee—of the North Atlantic Assembly. It has asked me to pick up the report that was mentioned by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and is lying on the Opposition Front Bench. It is a report on the state of the Russian forces: I have been asked to develop it into recommendations for reform of the Russian forces. I am to do that in conjunction with Russian delegates, officials and military. If we do a decent job, we could write ourselves into the history books. All that is sufficient recompense for losing my seat on the Select Committee.

I have one or two points to make before I turn to the main thrust of my speech which is, as the House might expect, land mines. Comments have been made about NATO enlargement and its cost. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said that he could not see the justification for NATO enlargement. Initially, I was also a little suspicious and wondered why, if NATO had been successful, we needed to improve on it.

The truth is that NATO's character is changing dramatically. I refer my hon. Friend to the comments of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell), who, sad to say, has left the Chamber—I know that my hon. Friend took note of them at the time—about the pre-emptive deployment in places such as Rwanda and Albania. That illustrates the sort of character that NATO is developing. It has been assisted by the development of the "Partnership for Peace" formula.

The NATO nations—on a 16-plus-one basis—can bring in other nations, agree the semaphores and dialogue, and harmonise the equipment and disciplines necessary for participating collectively in peace maintenance activities. NATO is no longer the NATO that we used to know. I used to be an advocate of withdrawal from NATO, but if we do not learn day by day, we are defeated. The one lesson that I have learnt—and I have been a delegate since 1987—is that if NATO had not existed when the wall came down, we would have had to invent it. The people who are most grateful to it now are the central and eastern European nations, which are clamouring to join. I suspect that Russia, although it has not yet gathered the strength to knock on the door, is ready and waiting for the door to be opened.

We have heard much in the debate about the value of our personnel, both male and female. To those who are worried about women in our forces I say that women are already there and performing important work—it is a question of what role they fulfil. We have heard about their value, the importance of their families, the distress that can be caused and the stress to which they are exposed.

We have also heard about Major Joyce, the difficulties involved and the fact that the only response may be a court martial. Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway, which are all NATO allies, recognise and make provision for an organisation called Euromil, which is a form of military trades union that allows military representatives to represent individuals without identifying them. Such an organisation for our British forces could—

Mr. Blunt: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No, I cannot give way as I have only 10 minutes in which to speak. If the hon. Gentleman wishes, I will engage in public debate with him—he can book the hall and I will pay for it.

A relationship between organisations such as Euromil—which exists for our NATO allies—and the Ministry of Defence could solve many difficulties. The Government have seen fit to reinstate the trade union rights at GCHQ. I hope—although I see that the Government Front Bench is empty of major Ministers—that they might consider the establishment of a similar sort of relationship in this area.

I hope that the review that is being afforded to the Gulf war veterans will also be extended to include the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association, which has, for many more years, suffered similar problems in terms of representation.

The Labour Government have taken firm action in Bosnia. I represent the Westminster Parliament in the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and in the North Atlantic Assembly. Their attitude towards the British in connection with war crimes prisoners has changed dramatically because of the resolution that we showed.

On 2 July, I sent a memo to Ronald Lehman, the director of the Centre for Global Security Research at the Livermore laboratory in California. I also sent a copy of the memo to my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for International Development. The memo stated:

> "This simple courtesy note is to alert you to recent exchanges between myself and Dr. David Eimerl of the Center for Global Security Research at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory when I outlined to him my ideas on the proposal to create an international organization to promote and accelerate measures to reduce levels of UXO pollution generally and APM contamination particularly, so facilitating the faster return of potentially available land to gainful use."

I went on to outline how the organisation could put to good use serving officers, retirees and volunteers who want to train personnel in the 67 countries that have been polluted with the filth.

On 21 July, I received an answer from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence who said that he had read my letter with interest. I am pleased to see that the initiatives taken by the Labour party in its five-point plan go some way towards meeting the call that I made in my memo, but I do not think that they are sufficient. We need to go further and the Government need to enlist non-governmental organisations to complement and augment the clear programme that has been set out and which I welcome.

This morning, I went to a seminar on land mines at the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies. I heard a lot about the difficulties experienced by researchers developing censors that can detect a pimple on a pebble half a metre below the surface 60 yd from an aircraft at 300 ft. The researchers are concentrating on detecting the land mine, which is important and needs to be done, but the papers of General Sir Hugh Beach tell of the censors to which I referred earlier—censors that can detect human movement, and direct either indirect or direct fire on whoever is making the incursion.

Those sensors are freely and readily available now, but we do not seem to be applying the right levels of attention to the problem. If we did so, we could remove the military necessity of using anti-personnel mines to defend our fortifications and do the job more cheaply, cleanly and accurately, without the need to eradicate the damned things afterwards when non-combatants are maimed and killed. People talk about the costs of doing that, but I would point out the costs of not doing it—for example, the unquantifiable cost of the arable land in this country that is denied to agricultural use because we do not know whether it is mined and we have difficulty finding out. I appeal for thoughts on this matter to go further.

7.40 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am privileged to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to be able to speak in this two-day defence debate. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook).

There is no doubt that our armed forces are among the most professional, if not the most professional, in the world. It would therefore ill behove the Government to stretch their conditions of service too far—a point to which I shall return later.

The strategic defence review is the sixth such review undertaken since the second world war and it takes place in a 15-year time frame. It is therefore important that we get it right. We must focus on our world role. In a brief intervention on the Minister for the Armed Forces I tried to elicit what the foreign policy base line actually is, and he gave me the answer I expected—one that was somewhat wide of the point and gave us no detail on which to hang a coat. Our armed forces are there to give us the choice as to whether we wish to take part in any of the world forums that we support so rigorously. I hope that no strategic defence review will ever take away that choice from the Government of this country.

With that choice available to us, we have taken part with honour in world conflicts and in world forums. We been able to participate so successfully because we have been able to equip our armed forces with some of the best equipment in the world. Whatever the previous Government did—I accept that, over the past 10 years or so, we cut the manpower of the combined services from 315,000 to 215,000—we always ensured that our armed forces had the best equipment in the world. I hope that that will continue under the strategic defence review and that we shall have the ability to procure the latest equipment.

I echo other hon. Members' comments about the Technology Foresight programme. There is no doubt that as we move into the next millennium the electronic revolution will gather pace. Every day, microchips become smaller, which means, for example, that rockets will be able to carry computers with increasing amounts of memory and that minor powers will be able to develop such strategic equipment far more easily. We have to be fast on our feet in our procurement programmes—we have to look at the latest equipment, but we must also look over the horizon to see what is coming along. That is

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part of the problem with procurement costs: we look at a piece of equipment for procurement, but then find that technology has advanced, so we have to change the specification. We have to acknowledge that problem and consider counter-measures.

In the short time available, I wish to deal with one or two of the personnel issues. First, there is Gulf war illness, as my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) called it. I welcome the open way in which the Minister for the Armed Forces is dealing with this matter and I ask him to determine whether or not there is such a syndrome. Constituents have written to me on the subject and there is no doubt that people have become ill as a result of the cocktail of medicines administered to them during the Gulf war. Of course, the cocktail was administered during wartime and in a rapidly changing situation, so I am not necessarily attaching any blame, but if genuine mistakes were made, I look to the Minister for the Armed Forces to come clean, and compensation should be paid to families who have been inconvenienced.

I shall refer briefly to our territorial armed forces. An easy path to take in the strategic defence review would be to cut our volunteer forces, but they are absolutely essential. They do valuable work in signals units and, in this age of electronics, signals and communications will become ever more important. It is, therefore, incumbent on us to draw on our brightest graduates and recruit the best people from our universities so that they can provide the skills of tomorrow that our armed forces need.

The Minister for the Armed Forces does not appear to be paying attention, but I hope that he will listen for a minute. The strategic defence review is giving rise to uncertainty in the armed forces. The sooner it is completed, the sooner the armed forces will know where they are going and the easier it will be to implement a realistic recruitment programme, especially in the Army where personnel are desperately needed. I hope that the Minister will get on with the review and complete it as quickly as possible.

I return to the subject of our world role and re-emphasise the primacy of NATO in our defence planning. The Americans are prepared to deploy 100,000 troops outside their own territory in Europe and elsewhere under the NATO umbrella. We would be crazy to do anything to jeopardise that. Some of the anti-American noises coming from some of our European partners are astonishing at a time when they are all cutting their defence budgets as a proportion of gross domestic product. We should be encouraging and thanking the Americans for their contribution.

I warmly welcome any expansion of NATO to the east through peaceful means—through "Partnership for Peace", not through annexation into NATO. That is the way to go: we do not want all those future NATO powers to gear themselves up with military expenditure, but we want them to come under the NATO umbrella so that we can control their thinking on strategic military affairs.

This has been a valuable debate. I have some important defence industries in my constituency. I want our armed forces to continue their professionalism in the world. I do not want them to suffer administrative overstretch. I want them to be equipped with the latest equipment. I want us to maintain our position as the world's No. 2 defence exporter—now well ahead of France. I want our brightest graduates to be involved in the Technology Foresight programme. I want some of our best equipment to be designed, produced and manufactured in this country.

Above all, I want the jobs in my constituency and elsewhere in the defence manufacturing companies, which are some of the best in world, to be retained here—or, if not here, maintained in collaboration with our European partners. To achieve that, we have to maintain a proper procurement programme. I do not want the strategic defence review to cut any of our options in the world. If in future we are invited to participate in NATO, the United Nations or any other world forum but are unable to do so because the Government have cut our defence forces, I shall hold to account the Ministers responsible for those cuts. If their words today and yesterday mean anything at all, they, too, will want to keep our armed forces in good shape.

7.47 pm

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Our Army, Navy and Air Force are recognised as unsurpassed in their capabilities and record. They are truly professional in roles as disparate as Northern Ireland and the defence of western Europe through NATO. They are admired world wide for their skill and discipline and bring great credit to this country. Nevertheless, there is a need to look closely at what we are asking them to do.

Times have changed radically over the past 10 years. The Berlin wall has come down, the Soviet Union has fragmented and today's foreign policy sees Britain's influence projected around the world through overseas aid and trade and the vibrancy of our arts and sciences and not just by military capability and alliance.

The previous Government made several ad hoc cuts in defence spending in acknowledgement of all these changes, but they were financially driven. It was not clear that our resulting defence forces were consistent with the tasks that we asked them to undertake. The current defence review is the first time that there has been a comprehensive assessment of our defence forces since the defence of NATO Europe against mass attack across the north German plain ceased to be the central focus of our defence policy.

The aim of the review must be to define the nature of British defence interests in the context of the new Government's foreign policy and to ensure their consistency with the scale and allocation of defence spending.

With the exception of Northern Ireland, which we must hope will soon not need to be a defence issue, none of the scenarios defining potential defence operations will involve a vital British interest on its own. We are most likely to be acting in concert with some of our allies in NATO or the Western European Union or the Commonwealth or the United Nations. It is impossible to imagine circumstances in which British forces should or would be called to operate entirely on their own. Even humanitarian aid operations would require some support from a host Government.

One of the major questions that the review must address, therefore, is, what type of collaboration with allies may be envisaged? Will it be collaboration with self-sufficient units, operating side by side with allied counterparts but capable of operating independently?

Or will it be an operationally integrated force of land, air or naval forces under an integrated command structure, the individual national components of which would be unable to operate independently?

Operational requirements and national pride have favoured national forces that are complete in themselves, but that may not be either the most effective or the most efficient arrangement in future. There is a great deal of uneconomic duplication among NATO allies in providing the fiction of independence for armed services that will never operate independently.

Changed circumstances have different implications for each of the three services and raise different questions. I shall discuss the Royal Air Force first.

With future operations more likely to look like Northern Ireland or Bosnia than the Gulf war, the overriding question for the Royal Air Force is whether our potential spending on aircraft is consistent with future defence roles.

A commitment has been made to the collaborative development and purchase of Eurofighters, with hard-won German agreement. It will secure Britain's aircraft industry and consolidate the trend towards collaborative programmes in Europe. Both those aims are laudable, but where is the scenario of future operations that would require even half of the 232 aircraft that we are committed to purchase? Even an engagement such as the Gulf war would not justify those numbers if we are playing an equitable role with our allies.

The previous Government's 1996 defence White Paper outlined plans to replace 37 Sea Harriers in a possible collaboration with the United States of America. The cost estimates given for the collaboration, at $30 million to $40 million per aircraft, are less than those for the Eurofighter, but for a far more complex aircraft. Unsurprisingly, the Rand Corporation and the US Congressional Budget Office have questioned the credibility of those estimates. The scene appears to be set, therefore, for the most familiar of all defence scenarios—an expensive project that ends with costs two, three or four times the original estimates.

Feasibility studies with potential US partners are also known to be under way for the replacement of 85 Harriers and 142 Tornado strike bombers.

Where is the foreseeable operational need for all those aircraft? How is such a potential financial commitment likely to be proportionate to their defence role? Is there a way in which the large number of Eurofighters to which we are committed could be diverted to meet parts of the other roles that are being investigated?

I come now to the Royal Navy. There has long been no call to deploy the Royal Navy world wide. There is no plausible operation that it could be called on to carry out without the integrated or collateral support of allies.

In the cold war, the submarine threat to naval and merchant ships was there, but with the break-up of the Soviet Union, where does that submarine threat now come from? Likewise, in the cold war the Navy had major roles in operations to defend NATO's flanks in Norway and Turkey. However, there is now no threat to Norway and I question whether any potential threat to Turkey from Syria or Iraq could justify a significant naval force.

On what basis, therefore, can the present size of the Navy be justified? Amphibious forces, including amphibious ships and the Royal Marines, are undoubtedly consistent with worldwide emergency and peacekeeping operations and obligations to some of our dependent territories. The ships can lie over the horizon without political commitment to an operation, but they influence events and provide for intervention at very short notice.

Amphibious intervention in emergencies or peacekeeping roles and the protection of North sea and Atlantic oil installations give a clear, firm basis for naval planning in the future. It seems unlikely, however, that those operations alone could justify a Navy of the present size, which, according to the 1996 defence White Paper, is 15 submarines, 36 destroyers and frigates and 44 Merlin anti-submarine warfare helicopters.

The Army is a service whose force structure, doctrine and training have been comprehensively defined by potential NATO operations in north-west Europe. It is here, therefore, that there is the greatest danger of things rolling on with the momentum of the past.

Tank battles across the north German plain are now the least likely operation imaginable, but quite recently they were a preoccupation of the Army in Germany. Heavy main battle tanks such as Challenger no longer fit into any future operational concept. The need is for flexibility and mobility and easy movement by air—all of which define a lighter tank.

The 1996 White Paper catalogues 386 Challenger 2 tanks on order and 350 to come. Although those may replace the unreliable Challenger 1 tanks, their overall role must now be in doubt. The weight of Challenger limits its deployment in most parts of Europe, including Bosnia, and expensive aircraft are required to move it anywhere by air.

In the new era, the Army will retain a central role in our defence, but it will need to revise its operational concepts and force structure to provide for a more flexible and mobile role. With that will come a need to rethink the equipment in a way that is compatible with greater movement and manoeuvre.

The defence review being undertaken provides for modernisation of the armed services—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his 10 minutes.

7.58 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I wish to make five brief points.

First, I believe that the decision not to replace Britannia is deeply regrettable and owes much more to political posturing than it does to sound judgment. It is much regretted in the New Forest, which is home to the CADLAND project.

Secondly, I add my voice to that of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) in calling for a Minister for veteran affairs. My constituency has a high proportion of retired officers, and the problems and anomalies that they bring to my constituency surgeries would be well served by such a Minister. Recently, the Royal British Legion at Milford-on-Sea asked me to raise that issue.

Thirdly, I should like to draw attention to the Secretary of State's statement on the opportunities available to women in the armed forces. I should have liked to address my remarks to the hon. Member for Thurrock, were he in his seat, because he expressed incredulity that my right

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hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) could offer only a cautious welcome to the statement.

My welcome is only cautious because in my squadron I rely heavily on the skills of two female operators to maintain high frequency communications networks. They train with my squadron headquarters and are part of the team, but if we were to go into operations I would be denied their services. That situation has not changed as a consequence of the Secretary of State's statement because the Royal Armoured Corps is beyond its scope. That is why I am only cautious in my welcome.

Another reason for being cautious is that some people will use the successful integration of females into the armed services as an argument for going even further. I am glad that the Secretary of State ruled out the possibility of female soldiers serving in infantry regiments of the line. It would be operationally unsustainable and wholly repugnant if female soldiers were to fix bayonets and close with the enemy.

A third reason for exercising some caution in this respect is that, as the hon. Member for Thurrock must be aware, an administrative overhead applies to any attempt to integrate male and female soldiers as a consequence of the intimate circumstances in which they must serve and at the same time to maintain discipline. As St. Bernard of Clairvaux said:

> "To be always with a woman and not to have intercourse with her is more difficult than to raise the dead."

As one is not capable of the latter, one is certainly not capable of the former.

There has been some loose talk about cutting the Reserves to some 40,000 members or doing away with the Territorial Army altogether. I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) that it is precisely because there is financial pressure on the defence budget that we should make even greater use of cost-effective Reserves. An argument that is being made against such an eventuality is the disappointing response in terms of volunteers for the high-readiness Reserves. I do not believe that that argument holds water. The effectiveness of the Reserves is much better measured by their outstanding contribution in Bosnia over the past few years. The disappointing number of signatures for the high-readiness Reserves is a failure on the part of the chain of command in its ability to inform soldiers and market the high-readiness Reserves.

To be effective, our Reserves must have adequate equipment with which to train. I draw the Minister's attention specifically to the decision to withdraw the series 3 Land Rover from service by the end of this year. I do not dispute for a moment the fact that the series 3 Land Rover should be withdrawn from service. It is extremely expensive to maintain. My squadron has two vehicles that are more than 18 years old, one of which was converted from civilian use and therefore has a limited range. I would have welcomed a decision to withdraw the series 3 Land Rovers as new vehicles were released. On 1 January, my light reconnaissance squadron will have no recce cars at all. To a light reconnaissance soldier, a Land Rover is as vital as a SA80 rifle is to an infantryman.

Furthermore, we have been told that only 60 per cent. of our establishment figure for those vehicles will be replaced, and as yet we have no timetable for that replacement. I can probably manage to train my squadron effectively with 60 per cent. of the vehicle establishment, although other squadrons in my regiment will have great difficulty in doing so. Nevertheless, it will be extremely difficult to train effectively at a regimental and battle group level with only 60 per cent. of the vehicles. Some units, by the nature of their tasks, will be able to function with less than 60 per cent. of their establishment, while others, by the nature of their role, will require 100 per cent. of their establishment. Undoubtedly, brigades and divisions will have their own priorities. My fear, however, is that even a division will have insufficient vehicles at its disposal to make those priorities effective. The matter must therefore be considered at Army level.

Those decisions need to be taken at the highest level and I urge the Minister for the Armed Forces to consider them.

8.5 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): The comments by the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) about working with women automatically leading to sexual intercourse sounded to me like defence of the rapist, and were patently nonsense, as are all such reasons for discrimination.

I want to raise six matters. As I have only 10 minutes, I shall do so quickly. The first is about the United States nuclear programme and follows on from the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) about the influence of our allies on the strategic defence review. I remember sitting on the Committee on the Arms Control and Disarmament (Privileges and Immunities) Bill in 1987 with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence when the subject of nuclear testing came up. He said in Committee that a comprehensive test ban treaty would be useful as it would form a barrier to further weapons development. Now that my right hon. Friend is in office, will he tell the House whether that remains true? There are disturbing reports from across the Atlantic of new nuclear weapons being developed. In the post-cold war period, that seems unnecessary.

My second point is about Trident. My opposition to its expense, uselessness in practical defence terms and immorality is well recorded. However, in 1995 a commitment was made that, on coming to power, a Labour Government would put no greater a number of warheads on Trident than there were on Polaris. I hope that an announcement that such a policy has been carried out will be made soon. If missiles can be ordered outside the strategic defence review, that commitment can be confirmed.

My third point relates to "suitcase" nuclear bombs. Reports coming out of Russia that suitcase-sized nuclear weapons have gone astray are alarming, even if the source of those allegations has limited credibility. If nuclear weapons are truly the weapons of last resort, as the leaders of the nuclear powers keep telling us, what is the use of such portable weapons? The fact that the weapons are so portable makes them harder to control and easier to steal.

The Americans deployed equivalent weapons in the 1960s—their atomic demolition munitions—but subsequently withdrew them from service. I understand that we have never had such weapons. Perhaps it is time to outlaw small nuclear weapons such as those. Britain will be in a good position to promote such a measure; it would remove a significant proliferation threat. The fear that portable nuclear weapons could be stolen and used for terrorist-style operations has been the source of film plots, such as in the film "The Peacemaker", which is showing in cinemas now.

My fourth point also relates to the Committee on which I served with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in 1987. I raised at that time, and have done so often since, the ratification of the 1977 additional protocols to the 1949 Geneva conventions. Those protocols apply the Geneva conventions to civil wars, and they should have applied to the war in Bosnia. I raise the matter in a defence debate as those are important documents on the laws of war and, as such, are in the defence sphere.

In recent years, I have been told repeatedly that we are on the verge of ratifying the protocols. Has anything changed with the new Government? The protocols were signed under a Labour Government, and it would be appropriate for them to be ratified under a Labour Government, but can we do that soon, please?

The fifth point relates to anti-personnel mines. This morning, I spoke at a United Kingdom defence forum meeting on land mines. I learned a lot about the difficulty of clearing mines from other speakers who had experience in the field. The moratorium announced shortly after the election has been widely welcomed. I welcome it, and I also welcome the new mines information and training centre at Minley in Surrey.

I am concerned, however, about the issue of use in "exceptional circumstances", which was suggested to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State before the summer recess. That reservation should be removed once the international treaty on land mines is in force.

Things have moved on. More than 100 states have endorsed the treaty that has resulted from the final meeting in the Ottawa process held last month in Oslo. The treaty is due for signing in December. It will come into force six months after the 40th country ratifies it. That will probably take a couple of years to come about. The Ottawa treaty may not be perfect, but it is a substantial improvement on what was available in the past, and there seems no prospect of achieving anything better in the foreseeable future.

We should be an early ratifier of the treaty. The opt-out on use in exceptional circumstances could be withdrawn as soon as the Ottawa treaty is signed by us. That would send a powerful message around the world that the British Government are serious about the treaty. We have much credibility to rebuild on the international stage, after many years of Tory intransigence on the issue of land mines.

The sixth matter which I shall raise is that of the Fabian Society pamphlet published by Major Eric Joyce, "Arms and the man—Renewing the armed services". Major Joyce has done us and the Army a favour. I shall not refer to the disciplinary action against him, which I do not support, but some of the comments in the pamphlet should be put into the record. He states:

> "The role played by social class in the way we in the Army recruit and organise ourselves, and the centrality of outmoded Victorian values to our institutional ethos, are now acting as powerful inhibitors in our efforts to deal effectively with our dire 'manning' crisis. We should now take direct action to consign our inefficient and unfair social divisions to history."

Major Joyce goes on to describe "three Victorian-style 'castes'" in the Army, which he calls

> "the *Posh*, an exclusively white, male, privately-educated elite which runs the institution and wholly dominates its culture. . . the *Professionals*, the middle-classes who provide the technical expertise and 'middle management'; and finally. . . the *Plebeians*, the working classes. . . the great 'use and discard' rank and file."

Major Joyce states:

> "The simple fact is that few school-leavers today wish to join an institution steeped in snobbery and where a glass ceiling will be placed upon their career prospects on account of their social class."

Social class is not the only issue. He continues:

> "On *gender*. . . we enforced unlawful employment policies. . . long after it became clear that they were wrong. On *race*, we continue to fail those from ethnic minorities in spite of regular and severe warnings from the Commission for Racial Equality; and on *sexuality* we continue to fight a damaging and pointless rearguard action against homosexuality based more upon the moral views of some senior officers than any meaningful rationale about the impact a change in policy may have upon operational effectiveness."

Those points need to be taken into account in the strategic defence review. They are about modernisation. That was one of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's central themes. We must bring modernisation to bear on those aspects in the strategic defence review.

I said in the last defence debate that I hoped that a change of Government would lead to a change in Government culture in matters of defence, with greater openness, fewer mistakes, much less money wasted and fewer immoral decisions. That is part of the modernisation process as well. I am pleased that Labour Ministers have made a good start in that respect.

8.15 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): In the time available, I shall speak about Trident, propaganda and security. I realise that the Government Front-Bench team has no formal responsibility for the security services, but I hope to speak about them nevertheless, because they have implications for the defence of this country. I shall not expect particular answers on the questions that I raise.

In a previous existence, I worked professionally as a counter to the unilateralist propaganda of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the early 1980s, and as the person at Conservative research department who had to investigate the Labour party's position on unilateralism in the early 1990s. It therefore brought a smile to my face to listen to so many hon. Members on the Government Benches saying, "What, us? Unilateralists? Never. Never heard the idea." It seems as hard to find an ex-CND supporter on the Government Benches as it was to find a supporter of Adolf Hitler in Berlin in 1945 or of communist Soviet power in Moscow after 1991.

Some people, however, stick to their former opinions. The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said that public opinion was in favour of getting rid of the bomb. That is news to many of us. Throughout the second cold war, when it was far more dangerous in nuclear confrontation terms, my colleagues and I commissioned opinion poll after opinion poll to ask whether people thought that Britain should continue to possess nuclear weapons, as long as other countries did so.

Time and again, we got the same answer, and we did so in subsequent years, too. Two thirds of people think that Britain should possess nuclear weapons as long as

[Dr. Julian Lewis]

other countries have them; one quarter want unilateral nuclear disarmament. It does not change, and I do not believe that it has changed.

I could not help but compare the behaviour of the Minister for the Armed Forces when I met him first a few years ago, when we were on a radio programme with a CND supporter. The Minister had at one stage supported unilateralism, but in frank conversations with him after the programme—I am sure that he will forgive my mentioning this—he admitted straight out that it had been a mistake, his party had got it wrong, and he would do his best to encourage the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) to take the appropriate attitude and learn the appropriate lessons from that. I applaud that, and I have never sought to exploit the fact that at one stage the Minister—

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): The hon. Gentleman is exploiting it now.

Dr. Lewis: No, I am not; I am applauding the fact that the Minister for the Armed Forces admitted that at one stage he was on the wrong side of the argument. I could not help but be amused, however, at the contrasting claim of the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) that, when he was in CND, it had been a multilateralist organisation.

I have the book that I wrote when I was working in Conservative research department, and I have the hon. Gentleman's entry. A measure of the multilateralism that he supported can be seen from two quotations. In 1982, the hon. Gentleman signed early-day motion 609 in which he saluted the "courage and determination" of anti-nuclear protestors at Greenham Common as indicating

> "the deep revulsion of the British people to the presence of nuclear bases on United Kingdom soil."

On "Newsnight", as late as October 1988, he said:

> "We've got to negotiate them"—

British nuclear weapons—

> "away. If we can't negotiate them away realistically, we've still got to get rid of them."

Never mind, the hon. Gentleman is on the right side now.

I turn to Trident. It has been suggested that money could be saved by reducing readiness through halving the number of warheads and taking the submarines off 24-hour patrol. Time does not permit me to examine that suggestion in detail, but I ask the Minister: does he think that he will save any money by removing warheads and putting a smaller number on Trident missiles? If he will not—and I suspect that it may cost money—it will be the most meaningless form of gesture politics.

By reducing the readiness of Trident or any other armed force, we run another risk. If we wait for a crisis to arise before restoring readiness, we risk intensifying the crisis by restoring readiness when the international scene has darkened. That is one of the reasons why, when Britain had run down our forces as a result of the appalling 10-year no-war rule which operated from 1919 to 1933—we finally got rid of it about 10 months after Hitler came to power—the Government did not feel able to campaign openly for rearmament until 1936. They were afraid of intensifying the crisis by rearming sooner.

We must recognise that Trident is a comprehensive deterrent against nuclear blackmail from whichever rogue Government or future super-power the threat may come. We have a great advantage over the planners of the 1920s who, as I have said in this place before, had so little idea of where the threat would come from that each of the three armed services made its hypothetical defence plans against an entirely different country. If I remember correctly, the Royal Navy made plans against the Japanese; the Army planned against the Russians; and the RAF planned against the French. I shall comment no further on the latter point.

We do not face that sort of dilemma with Trident because it will deter any possible nuclear threat from any identifiable future enemy. I remind those who ask from where the threat would come or who say, "If there is no threat today, why do we need it?" that the life span of our deterrent will be at least 30 years. It is worth remembering that the life span of the third reich was only 12 years, from 1933 to 1945.

We should remember also that Trident must constitute a minimum deterrent, not just at the beginning of its 30-year life span but at the end. Trident must retain flexibility so that it will be able to meet future minimum deterrence standards. I regret the fact that the Liberal Democrat defence spokesman, the hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), said yesterday that we must abandon the Moscow criterion: the ability to get through a sophisticated anti-ballistic missile system. If we do that, what will we do if someone develops a sophisticated system during that 30-year period? People will jump up and down and say, "You must not raise your minimum deterrent, because you will intensify the international crisis."

I turn now to the security services. I am concerned about a report published in *The Guardian* that referred to the Minister without Portfolio—a gentleman who seems to have been almost as unpopular with MI5 as he is with his party colleagues. In the report headed "Mandelson wants MI5 files pulped", the Minister defended himself against the fact that an M15 file on him had been opened, while admitting that he had indeed been an activist in the Young Communist League. He said:

> "I was not a subversive or a threat to national security—I was a teenager holding ordinary leftwing views."

I was a teenager at the same time as the Minister without Portfolio, and I assure him that his were not ordinary left-wing views; they were despicable views in support of a murderous totalitarian political system. Anyone who had held similar views about the Nazis would never be allowed to forget it.

Mr. Godman: And Saddam Hussein.

Dr. Lewis: I agree. It is a disgrace that the Minister without Portfolio does not even have the shame to admit that he was wrong. He seeks instead to destroy the files that show that he and many others were wrong. In George Orwell's novel "1984", it is said:

> "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past."

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

8.25 pm

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): In yesterday's defence debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George)—who is now the excellent Chair of the Defence Select Committee—said that many new Members now sit on that Committee. I am privileged to announce that I am one such member. After my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt), I am the second woman to sit on the Defence Committee. We are the only two women to do so in 17 years. I believe that that sends a positive signal that women not only are treated with respect in the House but are seen to have a role in the defence of the realm and in the armed forces.

I was also very pleased with the comments of the Secretary of State and the Minister yesterday. They outlined changes in opportunities for women in the armed forces. We are making a "quantum leap", and I am more than pleased about that. The move is not just valued or appropriate, but well overdue. I am delighted that the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) is in the Chamber to hear my speech, because I found his comments shameful and thoroughly unacceptable.

The Army's report into discrimination and harassment in the service has launched a very important drive. It requests that we eliminate harassment and discrimination, which I think is totally appropriate. From my experience as an equal rights officer for many years, I suggest that the path will be bumpy and the achievement very difficult, but nevertheless important. However, it is important for me to tell Ministers that I am disappointed that women are still excluded from certain roles within the armed forces: contact battle roles, the infantry and armoured regiments. I think that that is a problem, not because I believe that all women should take on combat roles—I do not believe that all men should do so—but because I believe that individuals have the right to choose. That is the absolute principle: individuals have the inviolable right to be treated equally. I believe that that should be the modus operandi of my Government.

I believe also that selection should be on the grounds of talent, not gender. It should certainly not be based—I make this point with great gusto—on prejudice. I found the comments of the hon. Member for New Forest, West shameful. There is no sense of political correctness in the Government's actions: we all wish to be part of Great Britain and part of the armed forces. We do not see you having an exclusive capability or an exclusive right. I am therefore disappointed that there are still only limited, albeit extended, roles for women.

The three services have used women in support roles on the front line, on warships and on RAF bases. How is it that we are good enough in support roles but somehow not good enough in combat? How dare you have the presumption to tell us that? We have the right to choose.

We all understand that it is crucial that we maintain a fully combat-effective Army. I have no problem with that, but I have a problem with the notion that, somewhere along the line, women need to be protected. I understand that concern and, much of the time, I respect it, but we do not need your protection—

Mr. Swayne: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It might not be my place to say so, but I feel that I ought to protect you from the hon. Lady, who is being rather unpleasant to you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The occupant of the Chair does not need that kind of protection.

Ms Taylor: I have nearly finished what I want to say.

The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency states that women are not strong enough. Who says so? The physical tests involve a single lift, repetitive lifts, carrying, and a loaded march. My mother was 5 ft tall and worked as a nurse for 15 years, until she was 58, repeatedly lifting very heavy dead weights. She did it with concern and compassion. No one has the right to say that women are not strong enough. If we pass the physical test, we should be included. As I said, we have the right to choose. That means that we all have the right to be treated and selected fairly.

We are in the throes of a strategic defence review. A careful analysis is being made of our strengths and of our future needs. Like many hon. Members, I was appalled by the previous Government's treatment of the Army. There were expenditure cuts with no analysis—one badly thought-out act followed another. My constituency was at the raw end of those cuts. My predecessor, Tim Devlin, fought valiantly. He asked the Conservative Government to think again and not to remove the naval stores from Eaglescliff in the constituency. He failed. The previous Government were not prepared to listen. They were prepared only to cut—

Mr. Blunt: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Taylor: No, I will not. The previous Government were cutting for one reason only—because public expenditure was out of control. They wanted to save money at the expense of the 600 jobs that were lost in my constituency. That is perhaps not as many as other constituencies lost, but the loss came on top of already high unemployment. I hope that my Government will never do that. We should never cut simply because public expenditure is out of control.

8.32 pm

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Most hon. Members have welcomed the strategic defence review. It provides an opportunity to influence future defence policy, first by examining Britain's commitments and interests and, secondly, by matching the defence requirements to sustain those commitments and interests. The Government have stated that they want strong defence forces, that they are committed to collective security through NATO and to being a major contributor to the peacekeeping efforts of the United Nations. We have many and diverse interests and commitments throughout the world, and our investments overseas are greater than those of any other European Union country.

In the past 10 years, our outstanding armed forces have been actively involved and deployed not only in Europe but in the middle east, the Falklands, the far east, central America and Africa. There is therefore a national imperative to sustain a strong Navy with a flexible, experienced and expert amphibious force as an integral

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part of it. I sincerely hope that the Government will never underestimate the expertise and know-how required to conduct amphibious warfare. If we do not have amphibious forces, we shall be completely dependent on friendly ports and airfields when conducting expeditionary operations, including peace support, the evacuation of nationals and conflict itself.

Last night, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) kindly allowed me to intervene on his speech to remind the House that today is the 333rd anniversary of the formation of the Royal Marines. For centuries, the Royal Marines, as an integral part of the Royal Navy have, with the Navy, built up an expertise, flexibility and efficiency in amphibious operations which is the envy of the world. However, that is not all that the Royal Marines have provided and will, I hope, continue to provide for our country. They offer an extremely wide utility over the defence spectrum. They are specialists in arduous and difficult climate and terrain conditions—for example, in cold weather, the jungle and the desert. They also provide excellent value for money and are eminently well suited to an era of co-operation with other countries. The Royal Marines' close links with the United States Marine Corps are well known. They also have links with many other foreign marine corps. For example, next May is the 25th anniversary of the United Kingdom/Netherlands amphibious force.

I was therefore shocked during the recent recess to read press speculation of a merger between the Royal Marines and the Parachute Regiment. Press speculation can be a precursor to Government action. These formations have entirely separate and distinct cultures, histories and roles, and the speculation is bad for morale and for recruitment.

I hope that the Minister who winds up the debate will confirm the 1996 order for two new landing ships to be known, I understand, as Bulwark and Albion, replacements for the old Bulwark and Albion, and that he will acknowledge the vital importance to Britain's interests of having a specialist amphibious capability. Integral to that is the role of the Royal Navy and Britain's commandos, the Royal Marines.

8.37 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I welcome the establishment of the strategic defence review and especially the Secretary of State's repeated assertions that strong defence is essential to winning public support. It is a message which is particularly relevant to my constituency which has a long and proud military tradition and was for many years the home of one of the nation's most distinguished regiments. I pay tribute to my constituents who served in the armed forces recently, especially in Bosnia, the Gulf and the Falklands.

I am delighted that the Government are reopening the issue of Gulf war syndrome and considering seriously the problems experienced by so many people who served in the Gulf. I hope that a similar re-examination can be granted to people who suffered debilitating illnesses as a result of their being nuclear test veterans.

I hope that regimental museums will be considered in the defence review as they fall within the Ministry of Defence budget. The cuts inherited from the previous Government are causing major problems for these important parts of our national heritage.

The most important point about the review is that it will be foreign policy led. There has been a concern for many years that Britain's defence policy has been the result of centuries of imperialism and historical accident rather than being the servant of a coherent foreign policy. It is critical that the foreign policy parameters for the review are well examined and clearly thought out. If that means that the review takes a further six months to complete, it will be six months well spent.

The debate is no longer about stronger or weaker defence, but about appropriate defence. That is why it is important to agree on Britain's role in the world in the last years of this century and the early years of the next. Our defence policy and our armed forces commitments must match our foreign policy responsibilities.

Many hon. Members have commented in the past two days on the implications of the end of the cold war. It is said that future threats to our security will come, not from global nuclear warfare but from a series of regional conflicts, from ethnic struggles and divisions, from international terrorism and from the increasing problem of the international drugs trade. It follows that the central issue for the defence review is whether our current military structures, systems, personnel levels and, above all, hardware are matched to the security threats of the future. I am thinking in particular of Eurofighter and Trident. It is interesting that questions were raised from the Opposition Benches about the appropriateness of Eurofighter for defence in the first part of the next century.

The defence review must also consider other issues. We need to re-examine the concept of security and insecurity and consider the causes of insecurity, which are rooted, as several hon. Members have already said, in injustice, unemployment, great inequality and the fierce struggle for a share of natural resources. We also need to consider our future relationships within NATO and its eastward expansion. Future generations will be astonished that the decision to enlarge NATO has been taken without any public debate. It is remarkable that in the United Kingdom, and perhaps also in the United States, there is almost no understanding, debate or concern about the implications of the eastward expansion of NATO. It may well be beneficial to United Kingdom security in the long run, but, on the other hand, it may be the precursor to a different kind of cold war in the 21st century. The issues must be clearly examined and there should be a thorough public debate.

Our relationship with the United Nations and the role of the United Nations—although that is a foreign policy issue—must be dealt with in the defence review. Our position as a permanent member of the Security Council gives us advantages in helping to change the role of the United Nations in the next century. Several hon. Members have pointed out the importance of early, pre-emptive strikes and the early use of military intervention to avoid greater military conflict later. The United Nations has a crucial role to play in that and our troops have a crucial role to play in the United Nations.

I welcome the comments of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the defence diversification agency. It is vital that it should be introduced as soon as possible. Most employees in the defence industry understand that there cannot be a continuing expansion of military production. Basing our industrial production on ever-higher levels of production of ever-more complex weapons is an unsustainable vision for the future of this continent and of the planet. There has to be an alternative. That alternative cannot be simply to throw the skills of defence workers out on to the streets. We must use those skills in more socially useful production.

The defence review should also consider our future defence policy with our European partners. One of the most interesting aspects of the Maastricht treaty—signed by the previous Government—is its commitment to a common European defence policy. There has been little public debate about that common European defence policy to which the previous Government committed us. The issue raises important questions about the role of Britain's independent nuclear deterrent in a future common European defence policy.

We are where we are with Trident. There are serious questions about the conditions under which Trident could ever be used. It is difficult to foresee a scenario in which it could be used without inconceivable damage to the global environment and without the permission of the President of the United States or our European partners.

The issue is crucial to the global development of nuclear weapons. If we accept that Trident is a legitimate form of defence, every other country in the world can realistically argue that it should also have Trident. Our position on Trident was clearly set out in the manifesto. Our intention to seek to eliminate nuclear weapons from the world is also clear. I believe that Trident has an important role to play in that. The Government should be strongly encouraged to consider ways in which Trident can be used to influence the elimination of nuclear weapons globally.

Some hon. Members have said that the best way to maintain peace is to prepare for war. I cannot agree that that presents a sustainable future for the planet. It was also pointed out earlier that defence was not an issue in the election campaign. The key issues were jobs, education and health. Those are crucial issues, directly related to Britain's defence policy.

Why do we spend significantly more than our European partners? I do not believe that it is possible or advisable to set an arbitrary target for defence spending. The level of defence spending has to be related to foreign policy commitments. However, we have to ask whether it is the case that, because Germany spends less on defence than we do—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat under the 10-minutes rule.

8.47 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Unlike some of the hardened old cynics from my party who have argued over the past couple of days that the strategic defence review is entirely run by the Treasury and is based on no foreign policy, I intend to accept the Secretary of State's assertion that the review has no Treasury content, that there will be no deep cuts in our armed forces and that British defence will continue much as it has for the past 20 or 30 years. However, I sympathise in advance with the Secretary of State if, when the results are announced in April or May, there are deep, hurting cuts in the Army, the Navy and the Royal Air Force, when he will have to consider his position, having given the House such categorical assurances that the Treasury had no part to play in the strategic defence review.

I should like to make a few remarks about the Territorial Army. I have substantial defence interests in my constituency. We have the Army in Colerne, Corsham and Hullavington and the RAF at Lyneham. Astonishingly for a land-locked constituency, North Wiltshire even has the Royal Navy in the form of RN Copenacre. My constituency covers the whole spectrum.

I intend, however, to devote my remarks entirely to the Territorial Army, with which I have some personal connection and which plays an outstanding role in my constituency. I am proud to be wearing this evening the Honourable Artillery Company tie. I do not say that through any claim to military distinction because I can almost certainly say that I am the least distinguished soldier in the history of the British Army. I joined the HAC as a grade 3, band 3 gunner. I then did my basic gunner's course and my basic driver's course, and I even did my officer cadet's course, although I was never promoted. I served for seven distinguished years at the end of which I left the Army as a grade 3, band 3 gunner. Without question, that was the least distinguished career in the history of the British Army.

I am, none the less, hugely proud of all that the regiment did. In France the other day, I went into a cemetery to discover that Honourable Artillery Company members died in their hundreds at the age of 18. They marched out of the barracks in London straight into war and they were killed instantly. I am immensely proud of that record not because of my personal distinction in the regiment, but because of the regiment in general. Similarly, in the second world war, we produced thousands of officers because we had by that time become an officer cadet unit, and we are now serving in Bosnia for the first time since the second world war.

The Territorial Army makes a huge contribution in my constituency. Last Friday, I visited the 23rd signals division based in Corsham which consists of 3,500 personnel, between one half and two thirds of whom are in the Territorial Army. That base includes one regiment that is wholly territorial, the only regiment in the British Army that, I believe, is wholly integrated into a brigade. The brigade also has a squadron composed entirely of British Telecom engineers. They are not people who come away at weekends to train, but people who come away at weekends to work and to make a contribution to the signals and communications of today's modern Army.

The territorials make three particular contributions to the Army. The first is as reservists, the citizen soldiers of old, and that is a tremendously important role. The second contribution is as volunteers playing an active role, as in Bosnia, as a result of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 under which they can now volunteer to go abroad. The third contribution is the role such as that played by my British Telecom engineers.

More importantly, the Territorial Army makes a huge contribution to the local community and to businesses. The Territorial Army invests in people, especially the young. It provides people with personal skills and confidence which they would not necessarily get in civilian life. Civilian employers know that well and are happy to give extra leave to any of their personnel who choose to join the Territorial Army.

[Mr. James Gray]

The Territorial Army also makes a useful contribution to community spirit and to some of the values that may have been lost in the 1990s. I think of values such as pride in the nation which some of our young people usefully get from the Territorial Army. The TA upholds those traditional values and is a useful link—the only useful link in many parts of the country—between the Army and civilian life.

I am concerned that the Territorial Army may be seen as the soft underbelly of the Army if the review turns out to be a cost-cutting exercise. The fact is that the TA costs only 5 per cent. of the total Army budget, but it makes a huge contribution to the country and to the defence of the realm. The TA punches above its weight in a very real way and costs about one fifth of the cost of its regular counterpart. We and the regular Army must not forget that. The Secretary of State may like to consider, instead of using regular Army officers to advise him on the Territorial Army, involving the four TA brigadiers during the review.

The regimental system may be considered to be an expensive luxury in the regular Army. It is, however, particularly important in the Territorial Army where members may be entirely separate from each other and may come together only once a week on a Wednesday evening and for two weekends in the middle of the summer. It is terribly important to them to have regimental pride, a regimental history and a regimental museum, which the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) mentioned a few minutes ago. All those things matter terribly if one sees one's mates only once or twice a month and when one often has to serve with them in extremely uncomfortable circumstances.

The boffins in the Ministry of Defence may say, "The regimental system in general is desperately expensive. Let us do away with it." They may say, "The regimental system in the Territorial Army simply cannot be justified any more. It would be much more efficient to do what the Canadians did and to bring in cross-skills units." They should bear in mind that the Canadians quickly discovered that that was a mistake and that they are in the process of reintroducing the regimental system which served them so well.

I appeal to those who are taking part in the strategic defence review not to think lightly of the Territorial Army. I appeal to them to bear in mind the immense contribution it makes to the defence of the realm and to society. I appeal to them in particular to preserve the regimental system within the TA.

8.55 pm

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I share the concern expressed by the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) about the maintenance of the Territorial Army. I must also say, although she is not in her place, that I am in profound disagreement with my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) when she argues for women being allowed untrammelled access to all units in the armed forces. In that regard, curiously enough as an old-fashioned Labour man, I am in complete agreement with the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne). I believe that women cannot be allowed to join infantry regiments. The mind boggles at the thought of women joining the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, for example. I have no doubt that I am in the black book that the hon. Gentleman's neighbour, the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), has brought into the debate. I compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) on her fine speech both in defence of her constituents and on Gulf war veterans.

Although he is not in his place, I offer belated compliments and thanks to the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames). When he was Minister of State, he had an open-door policy for Members with constituency problems related to the Ministry of Defence. I had a number of meetings with him. He rarely, if ever, accepted the case that I put to him, but he always showed immense affability and good humour. He once said to me in relation to the passage of Trident submarines through traditional fishing grounds near where I live that I was known as the fisherman's friend. He, too, always showed deep concern for fishermen in relation to the passage of those massive vessels through their fishing grounds. I hope that my hon. Friends will ensure that the code of practice for submarines in respect of fishermen going about their everyday activities will be strengthened. Not so long ago, we lost four fishermen in a terrible accident involving a nuclear submarine.

I thank the hon. Members for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and for Taunton (Mrs. Ballard) and my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) for their support for Major Eric Joyce. He may have been somewhat indiscreet vis-à-vis Queen's regulations, but he should not have to face the ordeal of a court martial. Perhaps he will be a little more discreet in future.

Although it is a long time since I wore uniform, I am very proud of our armed services. For some strange reason, last year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who was then the Opposition Chief Whip, invited me to Bosnia to act as an international observer at the elections there. Again for some strange reason, I finished up in an appalling hotspot known as Brcko along with the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). I was immensely relieved when my Tory colleague informed me that we were being guarded unobtrusively by six members of the SAS. As an old red cap, I was delighted to hear that, although I had not spotted them.

Let me say to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that the work force at Royal Ordnance Bishoptown understand the need for change in terms of defence procurement and international agreements. The factory is not in my constituency. It is in the neighbouring one, but some of my constituents work there. They are hard working and loyal to their nation and to its defence needs. I hope that the Minister will treat with sympathy our representations on their behalf and invite the hon. Members concerned to his office, so that we can discuss the genuine fears that those people have about their continued employment.

I was pleased to hear the powerful statement by my hon. Friend the Minister of State concerning the Army's determination to stamp out the evils of bullying and sexual and racial discrimination and harassment. I certainly encountered those problems when I was a young soldier. I thought that some of the worst excesses would have been stamped out by now. I say that in defence of many of my young constituents who serve with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and other Scottish infantry regiments. Bullying by junior NCOs has to be stamped out and officers at the ranks of lieutenant, captain and major have a duty to ensure that it is eradicated.

Not so long ago, a young woman constituent of mine who had been very keen to join the Army suffered terrible harassment at the hands of a thuggish corporal during her initial training. She was treated very badly simply because she was a Scot. If certain hon. Members want separation, that is the way to send us down that road. She suffered dreadfully. I brought the matter to the attention of the then Minister of State, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex, and it was dealt with. However, it was a disgraceful case and her parents were extremely angry. There have been other recent cases involving young recruits from Scotland who have been badly treated. The problem must be stamped out.

I should like there to be a much more open form of promotion from the ranks into commissioned ranks. I have always believed that our warrant officers and senior NCOs are the backbone of the British Army. As a young service man, I used to thank God for their presence, given some of the chinless wonders who had pips on their shoulders. When I was in a rough house, I was always pleased to have a couple of those NCOs alongside me.

We cannot have women in infantry regiments. I also believe that the rules and procedures concerning courts martial need to be changed and probably will be. Despite being old-fashioned in some of my views, I have no objections to homosexuals serving in our armed forces. That may well be forced upon us in time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who is not in his place, is a pacifist. I do not share his views, but I do have similar concerns about the expansion of NATO. I believe that the expansion is being driven by the Americans, in their interests, in order to maintain their grip on most of continental Europe. NATO should and must be led by European senior military officers and not Americans. One day, the Americans will pull out of Europe, and we need contingency plans for when that day dawns.

9.4 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): It was Lord Mayhew who, while Liberal spokesman on defence in another place, said that the call for a defence review in opposition was a glorious escape route from a policy. We know that the Labour party in opposition was caught in a pincer movement, where any policy acceptable to the country was not going to be acceptable to the party. One has to congratulate the Labour party on the way in which in opposition it put the invisible man in charge of defence policy, who followed his orders to kill the issue as effectively as possible. The right hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) certainly did his political task well.

In opposition, as it aspired to govern, the Labour party should have thought privately and deeply about defence. There is no evidence that it has done so. It is impossible to find any speech devoted to defence made in public by the leader of the Labour party in the past decade. Indeed, it is impossible to find almost any remark other than the standard eulogy to the armed forces in any speech that he has made. Even if one had dissected the speeches of the official Opposition spokesman before 1 May, one would have had only the vaguest clue to any potential Labour policy. One is reminded of Chancellor Kohl's remark 10 days ago, when talking about the search for the Government's policy on economic and monetary union, that there was no point in trying to find out as they did not know the policy themselves. In one sense, that is why we have arrived at the strategic defence review.

In the framing of the strategic defence review, I welcome the desire for consensus, of which much has been made. If we are to have consensus, the easiest way to achieve it would be on the foreign policy base line—but there is no Green Paper or White Paper on it for us to discuss today. The explanation that I was given—that the finding of a foreign policy base line is part of an iterative process—is fine-sounding waffle. Agreement has been possible between the parties, but the chance has been missed.

The speeches by the Secretary of State to the Royal United Services Institute, the English Speaking Union and the Select Committee on Defence were also fine-sounding words, but so vague. In his memorable phrase, they were so much "mother pie and applehood". In yesterday's debate, the Secretary of State said:

> "The British people . . . believed that we would protect and improve the tools that underpin Britain's place in the world, particularly our armed forces . . . We will not betray the trust of the British people."—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1997; Vol. 299, c. 610.]

How can one protect—let alone improve—Britain's armed forces if one begins the defence review process by saying that there will be no more money?

I am afraid that the conclusion that we must draw—and are entitled to draw—is that the process is a news management exercise. Yesterday's story was about an expanded role for women in the armed forces. Today's story in the papers is about recruiting the homeless into the Army. On widening the employment of women and widening the search for recruits, I entirely agree with right hon. and hon. Members on the Treasury Bench. It is a sensible approach to the manpower and recruitment problems in the lean years of the 1990s, which we were discussing in the Army in the late 1980s. However, we should not lower the standard of trained troops.

The Minister will know that this generation, which is—I am afraid—in many respects a couch-potato generation, requires an increase in training levels and an increase in resources devoted to the training budget. That is one of the serious strains that the Government will have to address in putting effective troops on the ground.

The absence of a foreign policy base line is a pity. The conclusion that we draw is that it is possible to change that foreign policy base line at any time in the process. In a sense, we are waiting for the Treasury axe to fall.

The real purpose of the defence review under Labour and the task that it has been given by project Blair—which defines the overriding policy of the Government as their re-election—is, first, to cause no trouble and to reassure the defence interest and, secondly, to generate sufficient money for health and education in years three, four and five of this Parliament. I must congratulate the Prime Minister on appointing a team that will reassure the defence community in the early stages. He has two Ministers of State who are expert—indeed so expert that I wonder whether the Secretary of State for Defence has had a testing time as they have demonstrated their expertise over the past six months. The Secretary of State

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

and his team are solid citizens in the eyes of the people who support defence. The team will be sorely tested in the months ahead, and let us hope that the faith that the defence community has invested in that team is realised.

So far, defence seems to be coming quietly. In the review to date, which has had no political direction, we seem to be heading towards the same answers as before. The three defence roles that we had under the previous Government will be translated, so I understand, into seven defence missions. The 50 military tasks will be translated into 30. The troops-to-tasks question will produce the same answer. The real change to our defence posture came in "Options for Change", as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) made clear yesterday. The underlying assumptions in "Options for Change", which was the real defence review for the end of the cold war, were correct. He got some issues at the margin wrong, including infantry numbers, although we restored two battalions in 1993.

The Minister of State yesterday drew attention to the problem of soldiers serving back-to-back tours in Bosnia. That happened to members of my regiment—the Light Dragoons, which is an armoured reconnaissance regiment. The catastrophic policy in "Options for Change" was to cut armoured reconnaissance from five regular regiments to two. I hope that the Minister of State will find room in the reorganisation to restore the three armoured reconnaissance regiments that were cut, because such units are eminently deployable and flexible enough to perform the tasks that face the modern Army. Perhaps the Minister of State will be able to produce six proper armoured regiments with 50 tanks each, once we have our force of 300 Challenger 2s deployed, which would mean no change in cap badges or regimental numbers.

The review is addressing the same old questions. What is Britain's place in the world? What capability should we be able immediately to deploy? What national capabilities must be preserved in terms of our defence industrial base? What military capabilities must be preserved, even if they are unlikely to be deployed immediately? How much should our nation spend on defence in the absence of an immediate threat? All the evidence suggests that the answers to those questions are the same. The Secretary of State for Defence told the Defence Committee that he understood the requirement for high-intensity conflict capability and therefore the need for armoured infantry and self-propelled artillery. He talked about a global role for the United Kingdom, which means an amphibious capability, with aircraft carriers to provide air cover over troops we deploy beyond these shores.

I welcome the fact that the Eurofighter is exempt from the review. The Royal Air Force must have an effective defence capability and all the evidence suggests that the Eurofighter is the right answer. If it is not, Ministers have been badly misled for at least a decade and I cannot believe that that is the case.

I am concerned about the process. First, is the process of the defence review genuine? What will happen when it becomes clear that more money is required for defence, not less? Secondly—and this is the defining question—I fear that civil servants who are running the defence review wish to define the issues for 20 years ahead. When I was in the Ministry of Defence, it was difficult enough to make sense of the long-term costings for year 10. If we define issues 20 years in advance, we shall cut off too many military options by trying to address the tidy minds of the bureaucrats.

My major concern about the review is the same as that expressed by many other hon. Members—the role of reserves and cadets. The reserves and cadets have few friends inside the Ministry of Defence. The Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and even the Regular Army are not friends of the reserves and cadets, who take away resources. Their only allies are the politicians. The Secretary of State talked yesterday about getting the maximum value for money solely for defence. He must think about the role of cadets in the wider community and the effect on the personal development of many young people—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat.

9.14 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): In the past two days, many right hon. and hon. Members have spoken with feeling about their support for the armed forces and the defence industry. Like them, I have elements of the Army and the RAF in my constituency.

The hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) pointed out that this is a strange form of defence debate because we have very little to debate. It has been interesting, but there has been no policy document or White Paper to debate. We do not even have in the Library the defence performance document that the Minister for the Armed Forces promised in the summer would be placed there in the autumn. We were promised a mission statement from the MOD, but that has not appeared.

A general area of policy has been outlined in a series of speeches because—understandably, in many respects—Ministers do not want to be pinned down. Let us try to discover what this cautious defence review, heavily influenced by the Treasury, will come up with. One does not need six months to do that.

Hon. Members will have concluded that the big idea will be to restructure our armed forces into an expeditionary force capability. The House will realise that a series of crucial questions arising from that will affect personnel and equipment. First, such an expeditionary force capability probably will be expensive, as the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee has pointed out. Secondly, it will put even greater strain on our armed forces in terms of the number of tours that they will have to undertake.

In a few months, Ministers will be faced with making real decisions about major items of equipment including air, land and maritime systems. Are we to have new carriers? Will we have a future large aircraft capability? Hon. Members know that this is an area of difficulty and that it is highly unlikely that we will get both. We have not begun to debate the issue because Ministers have preferred to talk in generalisations.

Next July or August, we will gather here to debate the strategic defence review White Paper, which will fall into the orbit of the comprehensive spending review. Ministers will have to come up with some real decisions, and I fear that many hon. Members will be disappointed. The crux is that we and the electorate were promised a strategic defence review with a big vision. What we have so far is a cautious tale—not a lion that roared, but a mouse that squeaked in the corner. Many people will be disappointed, particularly Labour Members. There will be a series of options that Ministers will have difficulty explaining.

My final point is a personal one. Much has been made today about the culture in the British armed forces. There is no doubt that the armed forces have to change and are, in many respects, highly conservative. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) is not here, because he quoted from a poorly written article by a serving officer who churned out a load of old thinking—possibly sociology—from 10 or 15 years ago which has no relation to much of what the armed forces are concerned with today.

Labour Members who have not worked with or spoken to members of the armed forces have many mistaken beliefs. There is no place in our armed forces for bullying, sexual abuse or discrimination. The overwhelming majority of our armed forces, of all ranks, are totally opposed to that, and my hon. Friends and I would certainly support any action taken by the Minister for the Armed Forces to stamp it out.

We have probably the best armed forces in the world, and the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) was right: that is not something to be complacent about. The challenges that Ministers may require them to face, through an expeditionary force strategy, will place a great strain on them and their families.

9.20 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I congratulate the Ministers on their appointment and wish them well, although, to judge, from the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson), whom we all regard as extremely well informed, they will have an extremely rough time trying to fulfil all the pledges and ideals that they have given us today.

Although she is not here, I congratulate the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt), whose constituency neighbours mine, on her speech. I noted especially her interest in noise at Gatwick airport, as most of the aeroplanes fly over my constituency. I look forward to having a word with her about that and approaching the authorities.

The debate, although interesting, has been disappointing because we might have expected the Government, after six months in office, to give some hint of their defence priorities—Conservative Members keep making that point—and to be more specific, rather than obliging the House with somewhat platitudinous comments and, to be fair, not unworthy generalisations.

For many years, Labour Members have talked over and over again about the need for a strategic defence review. They have had plenty of time to get all the information that they need—the White Papers and estimates have given them a great deal of information—yet, six months after they took office, we are none the wiser, apart from knowing that to overcome recruitment problems women will be given a combat role and there will be a relaxation of the rules on homosexuals in the armed forces.

The plans for women in combat have been greeted with understandable caution by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young). I was a gunner in the last war. I was in a foxhole and I am damned if I would have found it suitable to find a woman there, exposed as I was to front-line infantry from the other side. I do not condemn women and it is not a question of equal rights: it is something about which we should be very cautious, and people with far more experience than I would back me 100 per cent. on that point. There are plenty of dangerous jobs that women can do, but there are some that are not appropriate.

There is nothing in what the Government have said that one can recognise as a strategic defence review: it is a review, but it is hardly one of strategy. There has been no announcement of any change in our foreign policy priorities—a point made by my hon. Friends the Members for Reigate and for Mid-Norfolk—and without such guidance we are completely in the dark.

There is little wonder, therefore, that the delay in coming to any conclusions about defence expenditure has created the impression that the exercise is primarily a review of expenditure policy: nothing more or less than a cost-cutting exercise. If the Government think that that is unfair, I say that it was unfortunate to be told by the Secretary of State at the Royal United Services Institute that there would be no resource constraints on this policy-driven exercise—just as he was negotiating a reduction of estimates with the Treasury.

For years, Labour Members have parroted the idea of a strategic defence review, but we had one, as hon. Members have mentioned. The previous Government were quick to recognise that the end of the cold war had important implications not only for Britain's defence strategy but for the NATO alliance as a whole, all of which was spelt out in "Options for Change". What is more, NATO headquarters was delighted that the previous Government had taken such an initiative. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) was responsible for implementing that change in strategy.

"Options for Change" has stood the test of time. It spelt out in clear language, as NATO has continued to recognise, that the end of the cold war would lead to reductions in armed forces and in the burden of defence expenditure. That was the peace dividend which all hon. Members welcomed at the time. "Options for Change" also recognised that NATO forces would need to be flexible and capable of rapid reaction and involvement in high-tech warfare.

We were among the first to recognise that, in addition, we should have highly disciplined and professional armed forces that would have the ability to carry out the difficult tasks of peacekeeping and peace enforcement. That ability has earned worldwide praise. Not an hon. Member has met members of the armed forces and seen them in action and not come back with such reports. Our armed forces cannot be that bad. When people criticise the state of the armed forces, I wonder to what extent they are making political capital out of the obvious difficulties that the armed forces face.

We recognise that the restructuring of the armed forces was right, but it left the Army, and particularly the infantry, overstretched. The demands of peacekeeping and of Northern Ireland have increased and imposed greater burdens. In the early 1990s, we knew that we would face some problems. It is no good the Minister nodding his head. I do not remember him as a great soothsayer telling us how we would be plunged into the Bosnia situation for

[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith]

such a long time. Those factors, with the demographic situation in Britain, raise the question of recruitment and, as other hon. Members have mentioned, the problem of reserves, which the Government cannot ignore. We particularly need the specialist efforts of reserves to reinforce the highly technical parts of our military forces that are so valuable when it comes to moving to intensive warfare. That point was picked up by my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) in his excellent contribution.

The Secretary of State mentioned the need to try to maintain a consensus on defence. It is right that we should try. To criticise, as he did, the previous Government for reducing defence expenditure to 2.7 per cent. of gross domestic product can only invite the retort that for years Labour spokesmen have urged a reduction to the average level of other NATO countries, which is well below 2.7 per cent. We are not the highest spender, but the criticism that expenditure has been reduced does not sit well coming from Labour. If the Government will lay off bleating about our expenditure, I promise to lay off referring to their past involvement in CND. *[Interruption.]* I gather that some of my hon. Friends will not; I understand.

I suppose that we should not pay too much attention to such bleating because it is another example of the typical Blairite-Mandelsonian rubbishing of previous Government policies that is so often the prelude to their adoption. *[Interruption.]* I could not resist that. I am glad that it is appreciated. I am all for trying to be pals with the other side on important matters of state.

There is no indication of a need for a substantial change in military strategy. There have been no events that could lead us to believe that the threat has grown worse. Since 1981, I have been involved in various capacities with NATO's parliamentary assembly. At one time, NATO was targeted by short and medium-range nuclear weapons. We had awful rows about that. A huge mass of Soviet ground troops faced us on land, their mechanised battalions within a few hours of Brussels, where we were sitting. France could easily have been overrun. The Atlantic ocean was infested with nuclear submarines.

Today, if one goes to NATO headquarters at Mons, one will see Russian armed forces officers. British troops taking part in "Partnership for Peace" training exercises in Poland are well spoken of. That, together with expansion of NATO to include Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, holds out greater prospects for European security than we could possibly have imagined. An examination of the NATO summit in Madrid and the NATO-Russia foundation pact surely invites the prospect of a new era of co-operation with the Russian Federation.

However, some aspects of defence policy could impose greater burdens. One is the relationship between the United States and its NATO partners. Our American friends express anxieties about the willingness of their European partners not only to foot the bill but to take on more responsibility for troublespots that they regard as of greater concern to Europe than to America. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown).

The first point leads to a second one which was picked up by hon. Members on both sides of the House—the role of Western European Union as an arm of NATO. France sees the United States control over the use of some NATO assets as undermining European sovereignty and choice.

Thirdly, some wish that the European Union would take on a more direct role in European defence. I worry about that. It may happen one day, but I am a NATO man and I believe that NATO should be the bedrock. I do not want too many people in the European Parliament mucking about with it.

Fourthly, the instability in the middle east speaks for itself. A growing proportion of countries in the middle east are extremely well equipped and have tactical missiles.

Fifthly, Britain is a member of the United Nations Security Council. We have to ask ourselves what importance we attach to our peacekeeping roles in areas outside NATO. That may be part of the moral quest, but if Britain wishes to play a leading diplomatic role in these days of drugs, famine and revolution, it cannot duck its responsibilities as a member of the human family through the United Nations.

Sixthly, there is an urgent need—this is probably the most difficult task from the point of view of cost and efficiency—to bring together the defence industries of western Europe in such a way that competition is not eroded, and we must recognise that to attempt to shut ourselves off from collaboration with American companies can only lead to increased costs. That point was emphasised by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire and other hon. Members.

I hope that collaboration with American companies will not blind us to the priority that we should attach to the merging of separate European national industries to form something that is truly European. We do not want a single bloc of European nations to come together as one company because that would create a monopoly, but we want companies of sufficient size to compete globally. Some American companies seek not only to dominate the defence market but to become global. That is why I attach great importance to our collaboration with American companies.

In this debate, the Government have not considered or recognised the judgments that will have to be made on military grounds about our armed forces. I can see the Government recognising that we need better air lift. Armour will still be needed, if only because tanks are needed to protect peacekeepers, but in reduced amounts and provided that the money is used to strengthen our ability to project force beyond our shores, as that is one of our worldwide responsibilities. If we are to project force overseas, we need heavy airlift planes, at least two aircraft carriers and support ships in order to continue our policy of rapid response.

I foresee difficult decisions in the RAF—they were referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). We shall have to decide where the balance of advantages lie. How many Eurofighters do we buy? They are expensive. To what extent could they be bought if we run the risk of reducing our capacity for long-range bombing? We should take advantage of the opportunities that we have—with the co-operation between BAe and Lockheed and their arrangements for the production of the

American joint strike fighter. All those issues, together with Trident, make me realise what important decisions, with cost implications, the Government have to take.

Nothing that I have mentioned involves anything near what one would describe as a massive change in our strategy; it is, rather, a continuation of the principles that have underpinned our defence since the early 1990s. Everything depends on making a budget that will allow the policy to be affordable. From what we have heard today, if the Government's intentions are to be believed—I want to believe them—we shall have fewer problems and we shall come through this difficult period. However, if the Secretary of State and his Ministers are forced to renege on his good intentions he will have no other course but to resign.

9.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): It is a great privilege to close this debate on British defence policy and it is also a pleasure to welcome the right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) back to the defence Front Bench after an interval of 25 years. He gave us an interesting tour d'horizon.

Over the past two days, we have had a wide-ranging, informed and well-attended debate on matters of great importance to Members of Parliament, the armed forces and those whom we all serve—the British public. The Government want defence issues to be debated openly and attention paid to all views. That is why openness and inclusivity are two of the watchwords of the strategic defence review. In the time available, I should like to respond to some of the points raised, but my colleagues and I will be writing to hon. Members about matters that I am unable to cover tonight. I convey my apologies in advance to any of those whom I miss out tonight.

Not only has this been a useful and informed debate, but there have been some interesting revelations. The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), the number two on the Opposition Front Bench, revealed at some length his complete dissatisfaction with the previous Administration's handling of personnel matters .

The shadow Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) revealed himself to be a serial reader of *The Guardian*—than which there is no more serious offence in the Conservative party, apart from having doubts about the Opposition policy on European currency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) revealed that he was not new Labour, which was a great shock to us all. His contribution was incisive and well informed. He is one of the regular stalwarts of defence debates, as are some other hon. Members who are present.

There are others who are no longer Members of Parliament, but who used to make regular contributions to defence debates. I am thinking of Peter Hardy—who will, I am sure, be making regular, informed contributions in another place—of Keith Mans and Hector Monro, who are still very much involved in defence matters, and of Bill Walker, whose contributions were regular if somewhat predictable.

The encouraging feature of the past couple of days has been the number of new Members of Parliament who have contributed to the debate. I should like particularly to mention my hon. Friends the Members for Crawley (Laura Moffatt), for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy) and for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw). One of the results of the general election has been a substantial increase in the number of Labour Members representing defence constituencies, and we look forward to their continuing contributions.

I am also pleased to see a number of new Opposition Members taking an active interest—although, in a couple of cases, that interest might be an act of contrition for previous incarnations in the Ministry of Defence. We look forward to all their contributions in future.

Speaking from the Front Bench, the hon. Member for Salisbury made what could be regarded as a low-key speech. However, he made some serious and irresponsible allegations about alleged delays in export licences. We have checked with the Department and with the defence sales organisation and they say that they have received no representations from industry about delays. If the hon. Gentleman knows of any individual cases, we shall be delighted to investigate, but his speech could only have provided comfort to our overseas competitors and he should reflect on whether he was selling British industry and exports short. However, given that the shadow Secretary of State has complained that Eurofighter was excluded from the strategic defence review, I suspect that industry will cease to be surprised at the antics of the Opposition Front Benchers.

The hon. Member for Salisbury also made the extraordinary move of coming to the House and defending land mines. My hon. Friends the Members for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) and for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) raised those serious issues during the debate and I wish to ask the Opposition spokesman a simple question, so that he can clarify the position. I am sure that the country will carefully note his answer. Does he believe that the Government should sign the international treaty on land mines—yes or no?

Mr. Key: The answer is a simple yes. We were delighted that the Labour Government carried on the work started by the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), which led the Government of Canada to press successfully for the measure. If the Minister had taken the trouble to listen, he would have realised that I endorsed everything my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) said yesterday and added only two points. The Minister might do well to listen a little more carefully instead of sweeping ahead with generalisations.

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman takes a long time to say yes and his answer is in complete contradiction of what he said in his earlier speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley made an excellent maiden speech. That is no surprise—she was an excellent candidate, as I discovered when I visited her constituency in the build up to the general election. It is no wonder that the previous hon. Member for Crawley moved to Mid-Sussex. However, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) made an excellent speech, with which we found ourselves in substantial agreement. I had better say no more and spare him further embarrassment. My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley will play a constructive role on the Select Committee on Defence, as will my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor), who also spoke today.

[Mr. Spellar]

My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley spoke effectively about Gulf war veterans, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor). My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North tried to relate that to the case of the nuclear test veterans, but the situation is not comparable. My hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces has made resources available to establish the facts in the case of the Gulf war veterans' and this action has been warmly received. However, studies were carried out into nuclear test veterans, in both 1988 and 1993. Those studies were conducted by the highly respected National Radiological Protection Board and the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and were published in the *British Medical Journal* for proper scientific comment and evaluation. The studies showed that

> "participation in the test programme has not had a detectable effect on the participants' expectation of life, nor on their risk of developing cancer or other fatal diseases."

Since taking office, I have discussed the matter with the NRPB, which is vigorously convinced of the validity of the results.

I now turn to points raised yesterday by the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) and today by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman). Both spoke about the possibility of a merger between Royal Ordnance, which is in the Bridgwater constituency, and a French company SNPE. I understand that the right hon. Gentleman has also met my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement to discuss the subject. The right hon. Gentleman will understand that I am unable to comment on the merger proposal until the matter has been examined by the regulatory authorities, I can assure him tonight that Defence Ministers recognise the efforts of the loyal work force at Royal Ordnance and will consider carefully the strategic requirement to retain access to supplies of ammunition and munitions.

Yesterday, the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), who, I am pleased to see, was able to return from the talks to be in his place tonight, raised the subject of the procurement programmes Starstreak and ASTOR, which affect his constituency—and Northern Ireland in general.

I confirm that we remain committed to exploring the feasibility of Starstreak in the air-to-air role. We have also emphasised to our allies in the United States that Starstreak should receive a fair evaluation in its competition with the Stinger missile to fulfil a US requirement for an air-to-air capability on attack helicopters. That is absolutely necessary to demonstrate that we genuinely have a two-way street in the procurement of defence equipment, and we are emphasising that point.

On the airborne stand-off radar project, I confirm that it remains our aim to place a contract in 1998, and that the Government very much appreciate the work carried out by the two contractors involved in project definitions. In both cases, we recognise the expertise of Short's and its importance to Northern Ireland, and we fully understand why the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone raised its case so vigorously.

That leads me to broader procurement issues. From its inception, the strategic defence review has included an element dedicated to the review of our procurement policies and processes. It could not be otherwise, given the underlying ethos of the review, which is to shape Britain's defence capabilities for the new millennium. That will inevitably feed into the way in which we equip our forces and thus our future procurement programme.

In the new strategic environment, our forces must have the flexibility to face a wide variety of tasks, from high-intensity combat to humanitarian missions, and they need the right equipment—the right capabilities—to do so. We are considering how best to procure those capabilities, making the most efficient use of defence resources. That is where our procurement policies and processes feature in the review. I would emphasise, however, that there is no procurement moratorium during the review. I hope that that answers the point made by the hon. Member for Salisbury.

We need to ensure that we obtain value for money for the British taxpayer. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, the British people want strong defence for this country, but they do not want defence at any price. We must justify every pound that is spent.

Undoubtedly, we need to do better in the sphere of our major equipment procurement. We need to eliminate the cost overruns and delays that have characterised too many equipment projects. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) drew attention to the National Audit Office findings on the MOD's major projects report for the year ending 31 March 1996, which suggest that more than half are overspending and that most will fail to meet their original in service date.

At that time, the average slippage in projects since first approval stood at 37 months. The main reasons given for that are technical difficulties, budgetary constraints, the need to redefine the programme and difficulties with collaborative projects. Programme changes already have added, or will in later years add, a further £400 million to costs; specification changes an additional £180 million. Poor estimating has added, or will add, a further £130 million and differential inflation in defence contracts £340 million. What a devastating indictment that is of the previous Administration.

Our goal has to be faster, cheaper and better defence procurement. To coin a phrase used by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State before the Defence Select Committee in July, we are looking for "smart procurement". Obviously, the MOD and industry have a crucial role to play in its achievement and at last industry has a partner with which it can engage in dialogue.

Let us acknowledge that there are real strengths and benefits in our traditional approach to procurement, but also serious weaknesses. The process can be unnecessarily long and it can be difficult to recover the time lost in delays once they have occurred. We have also tended to concentrate effort on achieving the maximum technical capability before equipment first enters service, rather than trying to get as much capability as we can into service on time. We are therefore looking to develop alternative models for our procurement process that will enable us to respond to the realities of the modern world.

We need a range of modern, streamlined procurement techniques that allow us to keep pace with technology, with industry and with the requirements of our armed forces.

What are the essential elements of that? The first is the phased introduction of capability through a continuous and concurrent process. That is to tackle the time and cost overruns and to achieve better value for money than in the past. The second is the adoption of best practice across the board by continually measuring performance internally and externally against that of industry and our allies. The third is making our procurement processes more interactive with industry, improving the management of our requirements and involving industry at the earliest stage, and working in partnership with it. The fourth is flexibility, looking at the compression of procurement time scales and the best way to allow for regular upgrades to keep pace with advances in technology.

We fully recognise that that requires a coherent and consistent approach from Government. As a result, we have make it clear that our aim is to align our processes more closely with commercial best practice and to work in a more integrated way with industry.

Mr. Brazier: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, as this is a subject on which, before coming to the House, I was privileged to be co-author of a study covering eight countries. Is the Minister aware that the list that he just mentioned does not include the armed forces? The early involvement of the armed forces, not just in formulating requirements but in project teams, makes the most proficient procurement system while the surest way to achieve the most devastating cost overruns is to have to change things after they have come into service.

Mr. Spellar: I look forward to receiving a copy of that study as the hon. Gentleman's contribution to the strategic defence review. He obviously did not listen to what I said previously because I said that streamlined procurement allows us to keep pace with technology, industry and the requirements of our armed forces. Obviously, that will involve the armed forces at an early stage. We are fully intent on that and look forward to receiving the hon. Gentleman's contribution.

We are looking to the various elements of smart procurement, taken together to deliver measurable improvements in our performance. We are determined to drive out the factors that are the main contributors to cost and time scale overruns, of which we have seen far too many.

Much still needs to be done to develop the full package of smart procurement measures, but the Procurement Executive has already begun to implement some elements. We also recognise the need to engage industry in the process and are already involved in extensive consultations with industry through the National Defence Industries Council. Its working parties are taking account of the views of companies, both large and small. That is very important because there has been a tendency to regard the prime contractors as the industry and to forget the huge numbers of firms and employees in an enormously capable and interdependent supply chain. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have such firms in their constituencies and recognise their value to the local and national economies.

The response that we have received from industry has been positive. That comes as no surprise as there are considerable benefits in this for industry as well as for us. It will help to sustain the British defence industry's place in an increasingly competitive global market through a continued reputation for quality, effectiveness and value. We shall back its competitive role in that international marketplace. After all, it was a Labour Government who first set up the defence sales organisation.

On the future of the UK defence industry in the global market place, one of the policy principles underpinning the strategic defence review is the Government's commitment—previously made in opposition—to a strong, capable and competitive UK defence industry. The aerospace and defence industry in Europe has been a tremendous contributor to economic prosperity. One has only to mention the success of the Airbus consortium in the civil sector. In 25 years, it has come from nothing to capture a third of the world market for airliners.

In Britain, the export achievements of British Aerospace, GEC and Rolls-Royce, and the thousands of smaller firms that support them, have made a major contribution to the balance of payments. The fall in defence spending, however, since the end of the cold war and the rapid rationalisation of US defence industries that has followed represent a huge challenge to Europe's defence and aerospace sector. The industrial giants of Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon Hughes, with their vast industrial strengths, will make it increasingly difficult for fragmented European industries to compete in the years ahead. Europe must respond to that challenge.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said at the recent industry conference:

> "Europe's defence and aerospace industry must rationalise or die".

That must have been a favourable message as British Aerospace shares shot up at the announcement. To lose out to US competition in emerging markets when domestic orders can no longer provide the critical mass required for continued viability is to risk everything. Sooner or later, marginalised European industries would founder as their Governments could no longer afford to pay the spiralling costs of keeping them alive.

While recognising this challenge, European industry has up to now been slow to respond, operating as it does in different political environments, with different forms of ownership and commercial systems. We in Government are not in the business of arranging transnational commercial marriages. That is for industry to do, based on its judgment of where its best interests lie. That is the best means of securing a healthy, competitive private sector industry designed by industry itself, not by Government diktat. However, unlike the last Conservative Administration, who dogmatically believed that such issues should be left solely to the market, the present Government recognise that we have a key role to play in the restructuring process.

The facts speak for themselves—except to the profoundly deaf. We are the principal customers of the UK defence industry. The decisions that we take in this area will have a profound effect in shaping the market environment in which the defence and aerospace industries operate. We have a role to play in facilitating the necessary international agreements that would allow mergers or joint ventures to proceed, and we can help by establishing a clear policy framework in which industry can make sensible decisions on how to restructure.

The need for defence industrial restructuring in Europe is urgent. The call for Europe to get its act together should not imply any hostility to our US allies, as was rightly

[Mr. Spellar]

mentioned by the right hon. Member for Wealden. Many industries have substantial business in the US and cannot ignore a procurement budget that is twice that of Europe combined. Indeed, some of the solutions to consolidation may involve US companies. We must recognise that a healthy mix of competition and co-operation between US and European industries is in the interests of countries on both sides of the Atlantic.

We must also recognise the need to widen the technology in the defence industries. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced yesterday that the Government intend to make the best use of the skills and technologies developed for defence purposes, by encouraging their wider exploitation in civil markets. Such defence diversification will strengthen the country's industrial base. In that context, I welcome the comments of the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth).

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I am grateful to the Minister for his kind remarks. Will he respond to my request for the Government to state that they will support Foresight action with Government money for research and development in the aerospace industry, along with the private sector money that is on offer?

Mr. Spellar: I intended to write to the hon. Gentleman about that, as I am mindful of the time available.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) referred to ballistic missile defence. The SDR makes it clear that we now face fundamentally different security risks, and he drew attention to some of them.

Our prime concern in assessing the need for ballistic missile defence for the UK concerns the ballistic missile threat as a means of delivering chemical or biological weapons. Potential responses are not of course limited to active ballistic missile defence.

The pre-feasibility study considered the options for active defence only. Its conclusions and those of other, related work have informed our work on ballistic missile defence, and continue to do so in the context of the strategic defence review. We attach great importance to work in NATO on this subject.

I shall deal with the questions raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) and the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) regarding the replacement for Fearless and Intrepid. I can confirm that the contract was placed for two amphibious ships with VSEL on 31 July 1996. Along with my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock, my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness raised the possibility of a replacement for Invincible. Studies to establish a procurement strategy for any new class of aircraft carrier are at an early stage, with further work subject to the outcome of the SDR.

Let me finish by recapping on the major themes of the British defence policy under a Labour Government. At the election, we pledged to be—and always will be—strong on defence. Our strategic defence review, therefore, has at its roots firm principles, including commitment to NATO, strong armed forces, retention of Trident coupled with progress on arms control, and support for a strong defence industry. That should be a welcome message not only in this country but with our allies. I am delighted to say that such messages were reaffirmed at this year's Labour party conference.

We do not want defence to be a party political football. We wish, through the review, to establish the widest possible vision about Britain's essential security interests and defence needs and the role of our armed forces. That is a change to the way in which defence has sometimes been viewed in the Chamber, which may disappoint some Opposition Members. However, we owe it to our service men and women who risk their lives for us and to our pursuit of our commitments and interests around the world.

Our armed forces are a great asset to this nation wherever they serve, and they want and deserve a clear sense of direction into the 21st century. The Labour Government will provide that direction through the strategic defence review and through our commitment to a country that is strong at home and strong abroad.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Standing Order No. 148 (Committee of Public Accounts) be amended, in line 7, by leaving out the word 'fifteen' and inserting the word 'sixteen'.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Aircraft Noise (South-west London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

10 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that this Adjournment debate is about a subject close to your heart, as you have an interest in Stansted airport. I look forward to hearing the Minister for Transport in London respond to the debate, clarifying Government policy in this area.

I have spent much of the past three years espousing the cause of sustainable development as set out in the Rio treaty. I was particularly pleased to see that the consultation paper for the Greater London authority defines the key function as:

> "sustainable development, giving all Londoners an improved and lasting quality of life, combining environmental, economic and social goals".

I read under the proposals for an integrated transport strategy for London that there is a need for action

> "to take forward London-wide measures to reduce air traffic pollution."

In that context, I speak tonight on behalf of my constituents and all those who suffer noise pollution both in south-west London and on the approaches to Heathrow. There are now more than 1,200 flights a day into Heathrow and, despite efforts such as runway alternation—which I applaud—many of those flights bear down in a cone of appalling noise across swathes of central Putney, Sheen, Richmond, Isleworth, Hounslow and on into the airport. When the northern runway is used, Fulham, Barnes, Kew, Brentford and Hounslow are affected.

Two years ago, the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) told the House that the aircraft instrument landing system required a precise line of approach, which was undeviating in the hardship that it delivered to residents below. The microwave landing system, which offers a variation of approach, has still not been advanced in the two years since the previous debate. Thus, there has been no improvement. There are noise limits only for departing aircraft and not for incoming aircraft—an oversight which has prevailed for years, despite assurances about a change.

Night flights continue to plague the sleep of the people of Putney and elsewhere. Why have such flights not been banned? In respect of the last consultation, a constituent wrote:

> "Our three-year-old son comes into our bedroom at 4 am terrified by the noise of the large jets screaming overhead in the middle of the quiet night."

Another constituent counted 39 aircraft coming in over his house between 4.30 am and 8 am on a Sunday—when Sunday restrictions should have made that impossible. Why cannot the departure times of flights from the far east be rescheduled so that they arrive at Heathrow at a suitable time?

Putney suffers doubly as it is also under the flight path for helicopters that use the Battersea heliport. Routes H10, H3 and H7 converge over Putney common, and thus all helicopters from the north, west and south fly over Putney and Fulham at very low levels. The noise can be excruciating. I, of course, exclude the need for helicopters to bring badly injured patients to Queen Mary's university hospital regional burns unit, a unit which I am fighting to retain at that hospital.

It is widely accepted that one way to reduce aircraft noise is to limit that noise at source. International agreement is essential, and I welcome the International Civil Aviation Organisation's phasing out of the noisier chapter 2 aircraft by 2002. I also welcome the checks instituted by the Civil Aviation Authority, leading to the grounding of aircraft if they do not meet the necessary standards.

As the Minister is aware, Cranfield university in Bedford recently undertook a series of experiments on a digital, pneumatic actuator, and I am pleased that the Department of Trade and Industry, British Airways and the British Airports Authority are working together in sponsoring the device that claims to eliminate most noise. Aircraft construction companies will need to adapt aircraft engines to control carbon dioxide emissions to ensure that the Kyoto agreements against global warming are not breached. It is important that noise pollution is tackled at the same time as air pollution is dealt with. Developments such as that which I have outlined are the way forward for an innovative Britain, finding solutions to problems.

This debate is particularly urgent because of the events of 16 October. On that day, Miss Elizabeth Duthie of the aviation environmental division of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions told the terminal 5 planning inquiry:

> "Government now believes that a continuing improvement (in aircraft noise) cannot be guaranteed indefinitely"—

a statement that appears to signify a change to the previous policy, which was

> "to do everything possible to ensure that the noise climate improves."

Alarm has spread through west London, especially as the inspector for the terminal 5 planning inquiry—Roy Vandemeer—believes that the Government have moved the goalposts. That will materially affect his work on the inquiry.

In July, Miss Duthie said:

> "night flights cause negligible sleep disturbance".

I invite my hon. Friend the Minister to spend the night at the home of one of my constituents in Putney to discover how wrong that statement is.

We thus have a catalogue of woe, and an environmental and social disaster. Of course, there are economic gains in employment and wealth creation, thanks to the superb success of BAA and Heathrow Airport Ltd. and the many airlines and companies involved with the workings of the airport. Heathrow is the stepping stone to Europe for the rest of the world and is a world-class industry in its own right. I am not suggesting anything that would harm that success story but, in the spirit of local Agenda 21, for which I lead in London, all the stakeholders—businesses, local government and local people—need to plan for the sustainable development of the airport. That must mean that the social and environmental damage currently inflicted must be reduced.

The need to work with the community is doubly important with the terminal 5 inquiry. Local people and I see terminal 5 as an environmental disaster, yet business states that it is essential for the continued pre-eminence

[Mr. Tony Colman]

of Heathrow. The battle line has been drawn up for three years—the Minister will have to decide, although I am not expecting her to express a view this evening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) has passed to me the response of his local residents association to the consultation by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on the integrated transport policy. The association puts forward the concept of airport environmental limits. I commend the document as a way forward which will enable BAA and local residents associations to sit down and work out, within the framework of the Greater London authority, a future for Heathrow.

The hon. Members for Windsor and for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) have asked to be allowed to intervene to support my argument. I have agreed that they should do so to emphasise the cross-party concern about the matters that I have outlined.

I ask the Minister to come to the rescue of the people of Putney and of all those suffering from aircraft noise on the Heathrow flight path by agreeing to the following points.

First, let the people decide about noise limits. In my response to the Greater London authority consultation, I strongly recommend that the authority and the mayor, not the Government, should decide about noise limits, just as they will decide about other London transport issues. The United States Government do not make decisions about JFK airport in New York; local government does. That is also the case for noise controls for all other United Kingdom airports, except Gatwick and Stansted. Only the mayor of London can bring together all the stakeholders involved. I look forward to the new consultation period on noise limits. I shall recommend stiff limits from 1998.

Secondly, let there be noise limits on incoming as well as departing aircraft and proper fines for miscreants, not the £500 fine currently levied.

Thirdly, let there be a ban on night flights between 11.30 pm and 6 am. That works elsewhere, so why not here? Consultation is due to start shortly. I ask that that should be an option that the people can vote on.

Fourthly, let controls cover all aircraft—small as well as large—including helicopters. Often smaller aircraft—and certainly helicopters—are noisier and fly lower.

Fifthly, I commend the Cranfield research project into noise reductions in aircraft engines. Noise pollution should be discussed together with air pollution controls at Kyoto. It is a worldwide problem.

Sixthly, let there be an unequivocal statement this evening that the Government are determined to reduce noise pollution on the Heathrow approaches, repudiating the views expressed by Elizabeth Duthie of the aviation environmental division. Let there be a target for reductions between now and 2010.

I was proud to be at the United Nations on 23 June to hear the Prime Minister make such a strong commitment to sustainable development and to a 20 per cent. cut in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010. The people of south-west London want a similar commitment on aircraft noise. They have suffered long enough.

10.11 pm

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) for allowing me to add briefly to his remarks. I agree that landing rather than take-off is now the significant problem. Unlike those living in west London, those who live in my constituency to the west of the airport have no alternation of runways. When the misery occurs, it is constant rather than infrequent.

The hon. Gentleman put the case for a ban on night flights very well for his constituents and I agree most strongly with him on that. I have said this before in the House and I shall go on saying it until the Government listen; it is essential that my constituents get the good night's sleep to which they are entitled. That can be achieved in Windsor only if there is a total ban on night flights. As the hon. Gentleman has said, that is done in other parts of the world. It is high time it was done here.

10.12 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I thank the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) for allowing me to speak. I am interested in the effects of noise on health. I live in my Richmond Park constituency, where we have had an escalating noise problem over the past 20 years. I am particularly concerned about health issues because I was a doctor in the health service before my election to Parliament.

There is an enormous, accumulating mountain of evidence on the effects of noise on people's health. Evidence on noise is being given to the terminal 5 inquiry. Paper after paper has shown how people suffer sleep deprivation because of aircraft noise—which has already been mentioned—and how people with mental health problems or heart problems are badly affected by aircraft noise. Their conditions may not be caused by aircraft noise, but they can be made significantly worse by it.

There has been a recent survey of attainment levels, particularly in terms of the reading ages of children living around large airports, which was initiated by people in Frankfurt. When it was planned to build a new airport, the people there decided to test a large cohort of several hundred children to find out what their reading age was while the old airport was in operation. They found that the reading age of those children was six months below average. The people involved had the good sense, once the airport had moved to its new site, to retest the same group of children and they discovered that their reading ages had returned to normal within a year of the noise being removed.

As well as affecting the population's health, aircraft noise affects the attainment of children in our schools, and the problem could get worse. I have been in schools in my constituency where, in the course of a lesson, teachers have repeatedly had to stop completely while an aircraft has gone overhead. The lesson is disrupted until the noise subsides.

I do not suggest that the problem is overwhelming at the moment. Twenty years ago, however, we doubted the evidence that was emerging on the link between smoking and lung cancer. That is how medical evidence emerges. The evidence that is emerging on the effects of noise on health and on children's attainment in schools around airports is at a similar stage to the evidence on smoking and lung cancer 20 years ago. We do not want in 20 years' time to have gone down that road and to have discovered that aircraft noise really is dangerous and that we should have acted earlier.

I urge the Government to look seriously into the problem and to take measures, as the hon. Member for Putney suggested, to do something about the problem before it is too late.

10.16 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Ms Glenda Jackson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) on obtaining this Adjournment debate and on affording the House the opportunity to discuss the important issue of aircraft noise around Heathrow. I also congratulate him on his generosity in affording time to the hon. Members for Windsor (Mr. Trend) and for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) for them to present cogently, albeit briefly, their concerns on behalf of their constituents.

As my hon. Friend acknowledged, Heathrow airport is an important national and European asset. It is the largest international airport in the world and in 1996, it handled almost 56 million passengers and 1 million tonnes of freight. In terms of value of trade handled, it is Britain's largest port. It is no less important to the local economy, providing 50,000 direct jobs and a further 26,000 in support services. It contributes directly to the prosperity of west London, which includes my hon. Friend's famous and historic constituency, and to the prosperity of neighbouring counties.

The airport also has a major environmental impact on the surrounding areas and on those living under its principal arrival and departure routes, an impact most of us tend to overlook when we go on holiday or travel abroad on business. The main impact comes from aircraft noise and the Government acknowledge that it is a cause of annoyance to many people and of more serious concern—indeed, distress—to some.

The Government intend to tackle aircraft noise in two ways. First, we will seek further reductions in noise at source through international negotiation and agreement. Secondly, we will set a framework for the control and mitigation of operational noise around airports.

The Government will do everything practicable to ensure that the noise climate around Heathrow continues to improve. There has been a substantial improvement in the noise climate around the airport over the past two decades and the improvement is expected to continue for the remaining years of the phase-out of chapter 2 aircraft. The noise climate thereafter is now expected to be much more favourable than was expected before the phase-out was agreed in 1990. As I hope all hon. Members will agree, that was a real achievement.

This success makes the securing of further improvement all the more challenging. After chapter 2 phase-out, we cannot be sure of achieving continuing improvements year on year, every year. However, the Government are determined to take all practicable steps to prevent a deterioration in the noise climate around the airport after the phase-out of chapter 2 aircraft is completed. Indeed, I restate our policy that we will continue our efforts to do everything practicable to improve the noise climate over time. In giving that assurance to the communities around Heathrow, the Government recognise that additional regulatory measures may become necessary to achieve the target.

In the longer term, we can expect further improvements from the retirement of Concorde and from incremental improvements in technology which, together, should more than offset the trend to larger aircraft.

Our aim, like that of successive Governments since the impact of aircraft noise became a cause for concern, is to strike a balance between the considerable economic benefits of the airport and the effect on the communities around it.

It is widely recognised that many factors other than the level of noise itself influence sensitivity to aircraft noise. For my hon. Friend's constituents, the alignment of Heathrow's two main runways means that during westerly operations, which occur for about 70 to 75 per cent. of the time in an average year, they are overflown by landing aircraft on final approach.

Increasingly there are claims that the noise of landing aircraft is worse than the noise of aircraft taking off—a point made cogently by my hon. Friend. Undoubtedly, greater strides have been made in reducing take-off noise. Those who live in the south of my hon. Friend's constituency would probably say that take-off noise remained the bigger problem. Aircraft taking off use considerably more power than those landing, but because modern aircraft generally climb more quickly than earlier generations of jet aircraft, their noise is now attenuated more quickly by altitude. Also, because there are more take-off routes, the number of aircraft flying each one is fewer. For people living under the arrival routes, by contrast, the steady succession of aircraft flying over them may contribute to their annoyance.

For technical and safety reasons, aircraft usually take off and land into the wind. At Heathrow, because the prevailing winds are from the south-west, the airport must operate in a westerly direction for most of the time. Furthermore, landing aircraft have to be aligned with the runway and are usually established on the instrument landing system by about nine miles from touchdown. They will usually have descended to an altitude of about 2,500 ft by this point.

The distance of nine miles from touchdown means that most landing aircraft using the southern runway have to overfly my hon. Friend's constituents. When the airport is busy, which it is for much of the day, aircraft will often join the ILS further east over Battersea, Brixton or Lewisham. When the northern runway is in use, landing aircraft will join that ILS from anywhere between Barnes and Greenwich. What cannot be varied is the final approach track of landing aircraft, which must be aligned with the centre line of the landing runway. A curved final approach is not possible.

For a long time, Heathrow has operated a system of westerly preference. The system has been in place since 1962 and is primarily a noise mitigation measure. Its purpose is to reduce the number of aircraft taking off to the east over west London, and so the numbers of people affected by take-off noise are reduced.

Historically, take-off noise has been the greater concern, but because of the improving climb performance of modern aircraft, the system of westerly preference is kept under review. The Heathrow Airport Consultative Committee and Heathrow Airport Ltd. carried out their own evaluation of westerly preference last year and their findings indicated that it continues to have the overall beneficial effect of reducing the numbers of people living

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

within the 57 dB(A) Leq noise contour. This noise contour is the one widely accepted as being closely correlated with the onset of community annoyance from aircraft noise during the day. Aircraft taking off from Heathrow are required to follow noise preferential routes. They were designed as far as possible to avoid the most populated areas. Pilots are required to follow NPRs until they reach an altitude of 4,000 ft. The one NPR routed over my hon. Friend's constituency passes to the south and is used during easterly operations only. That is for about 25 per cent. of the time during an average year. Track-keeping by pilots using that route is of a high standard.

Comparable fixed routes for landing aircraft are not possible before aircraft join the ILS and align themselves with the runway. That is because air traffic controllers require operational flexibility in order to maintain safe separation between landing aircraft. As a result, landing aircraft follow a wide swathe of tracks which are determined tactically by air traffic controllers until each aircraft joins the ILS for the runway in use. They must then follow the international standard rate of descent of 3 deg to touchdown. The resulting concentration of landing traffic on final approach over the last eight to 13 miles to touchdown is unavoidable. My hon. Friend referred to MLS—the microwave landing system. Even if that is introduced in the future and replaces ILS, it is not expected to change the requirement.

Wherever practicable, pilots are required to apply noise-reduction procedures known as continuous descent approach and low power, low drag. The aim is to keep the aircraft in a clean configuration for as long as possible to reduce the amount of noise reaching the ground. That means not lowering the undercarriage or using flaps until absolutely necessary and maintaining engine power at low levels consistent with safety.

During day time operations, aircraft join the final approach glide slope at a minimum altitude of 2,500 ft about eight to nine miles from touchdown. As I said, that is a minimum joining point. During busy periods, aircraft will join further east at higher altitudes. There is a trial in progress, which was started approximately two years ago, whereby aircraft are required to join two to three miles further east at not less than 3,000 ft between 4 am and 6 am. The purpose is to reduce disturbance from early morning arrivals by having them join the ILS glidepath at a higher altitude. The procedure should benefit not only my hon. Friend's constituents but those of the hon. Members for Windsor and for Richmond Park. I recognise however that it has less support from other communities. An assessment of the trial is under way.

Runway alternation during westerly operations has been operated at Heathrow between 7 am and 11 pm since 1972. One runway is used until 3 pm each day when landing traffic is switched to the other runway. The runway used also alternates on a weekly basis so that communities in west London benefit on alternate weeks from quiet periods in the evenings. It benefits most those who live under the last eight miles of the approach tracks.

Runway alternation was not extended into the night period in the 1970s in order primarily to provide opportunities for essential maintenance of the runways and associated equipment such as the ILS. A second trial of night-time runway alternation has however been running for some months and was provisionally brought to a close on Sunday 26 October. The results of the trial and the associated local opinion surveys are about to be evaluated—initially by the Heathrow Airport consultative committee and Heathrow Airport Ltd., who jointly initiated the first trial last winter. I hope to receive their report later this year. I will study it carefully before reaching a decision on any permanent arrangements. However, the initial feedback on night-time runway alternation indicates that it has generally been positively received.

Such initiatives and others are part of the continuing programme of research and studies which the Government undertake to develop measures for the mitigation of noise impacts around designated airports. HAL also undertakes studies through HACC and other groups. Safety must be an overriding consideration, but in a balanced approach, all important factors must be taken into consideration. We have a full programme. As well as consulting on the night restrictions, I hope shortly to consult on departure noise limits and to announce the results of the night-noise contours study.

Most night flights at Heathrow are early morning long-haul services arriving after 4 am. A ban on night flights at Heathrow was given serious consideration in 1976-77. It was decided after consultation to allow night operations to continue while taking steps to ensure that eventually all such operations were carried out by quieter types of aircraft. That has happened, and the noisiest types are no longer allowed to operate. Night movements at Heathrow have been regulated by successive Governments since 1962; their numbers are strictly limited.

It has been the practice for many years to review the night-flying restrictions at Heathrow from time to time—usually every five years. Just such a review is due to start early next year. It will consider the restrictions to be applied for the five years from October 1998 onwards. I hope to issue a consultation paper before the end of the year. I acknowledge that disturbance to sleep is a problem and the measures taken to alleviate it are important.

Weight for weight, modern jet aircraft are approximately a quarter as noisy as the first generation of jets, and half as noisy as the second generation—

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 29 October 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Cyprus

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

9.35 am

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I am pleased to have been successful in obtaining the first Adjournment debate on the first Wednesday after our return from the summer recess.

I begin by declaring my interest in the matter. I have been to Cyprus on a number of occasions and, for five days last month, I was fortunate enough to be the guest of the Cyprus House of Representatives, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) and the former hon. Member for Edmonton, Dr. Ian Twinn, and my wife. We met the Greek Cypriot political leaders and the candidates for the presidency.

My personal abiding concern about the island of Cyprus goes back a great deal longer, because my late grandfather served there for a number of years towards the end of the second world war and after it. When looking through some of his papers and photographs—he lived into his mid-90s and died a few years ago—I was fortunate enough to find the service records written by his brigadier at the end of my grandfather's service in Cyprus in the late 1940s. As a child, my grandfather's tales of his great friendships with Cypriots, especially those in the Troödos mountains, were of great interest to me. I subsequently formed a number of close friendships with many Cypriots, not least from among the many whom I knew when I was a student immediately after the sad days of the Turkish invasion and the establishment of an illegal regime in northern Cyprus in 1974.

The refusal of the western world to intervene at the time of that illegal act remains a blot on its record. I contrast unfavourably the then Labour Government's spineless act of washing their hands over it with the bold and resolute way in which Lady Thatcher and other Conservatives stood up to the Warsaw pact and responded to the invasions of the Falklands and Kuwait.

Today, I should like to consider the present and the future of Cyprus.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Given the hon. Gentleman's interest in Cyprus, can he tell us whether he has ever taken the opportunity in recent times to visit northern Cyprus or to speak to the elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community there?

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman is aware that there are great difficulties connected with visits to that illegal regime, but on a number of occasions I have discussed that matter with representatives of Turkey in this country. Frankly, I have not chosen to cross the green line because I find it difficult to establish contacts with an illegal regime. On several occasions in the past, however, I have visited the green line with a number of my colleagues and I have had an opportunity to consider the situation in that illegal regime. I shall respond in more detail to the hon. Gentleman's question later. It is important to look at what has happened in the period of occupation and I shall address that later.

I am delighted to see the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), in his place. I sincerely welcome what Ministers said in Foreign Office Question Time yesterday and I recognise that the Minister confirmed that the new Government support the accession of Cyprus to the European Union, as did the previous Government.

In view of Britain's special relationship with Cyprus and the advanced knowledge of the complexities of the Cyprus problem, which are well understood by those involved, both in the EU and in this country, it is extremely useful and constructive that Britain will hold the presidency of the EU when negotiations start in April next year for the accession of Cyprus. I look forward to the British Government's firm commitment to the accession being reinforced in the coming months. Accession to the European Union will offer the best possible guarantee for long-term security and prosperity for all the people of Cyprus.

Turkish Cypriots will probably be the prime beneficiaries of entry to Europe, because, since the invasion, the economy of the occupied part of Cyprus has plummeted. It is noticeable that, before the invasion, the northern part of the island was the more prosperous and the southern part was relatively undeveloped; since the invasion, which resulted in the Greek Cypriot community being forced to move to the southern part of the island, the economy in that region has improved dramatically, whereas there are great areas of dereliction in the north. In Famagusta, one can see the extent of the wastage of resources.

Entry to Europe will serve as a catalyst and open the way to a solution, which I am sure hon. Members want, even those who have close contacts with the illegal regime in the north. That will, of itself, help to ease tension between Turkey and Greece, which has been at a high level in recent months. However, the House should take careful note of the fact that Turkey has recently intensified its campaign to block the process. It has threatened the integration and annexation of occupied areas with Turkey. It is deplorable that during a recent visit to occupied Cyprus—the illegal regime in the north—the Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey, Mr. Ecevit, accompanied by seven of his Ministers and a number of warships, signed what he called an integration agreement between Turkey and the occupied parts of Cyprus.

It is ironic that, in an effort to stop the EU accession process, Turkey argues that Cyprus cannot be admitted to the EU as that would be the same as a union of Cyprus with another country. Turkey refers to the 1960s treaties, which it has previously said are no longer in force—such contradictory references show the flaws in Turkish logic. Turkey's arguments have been rejected by the EU and international lawyers on the basis that the EU is clearly

[Mr. Hawkins]

not a separate and independent state. Discussions at the time of Austria's accession showed that the Turkish argument is baseless. It is astonishing that Turkey, which in 1974 acted in violation of the 1960 treaties, now considers it appropriate to attempt to derive legal benefit from those treaties.

Madam Speaker, you will know that this summer two rounds of intercommunal negotiations took place at Troutbeck, in upstate New York in the United States, and at Glion, near Montreux in Switzerland. Unfortunately, once again, no progress was achieved on the fundamental issues. The positive and constructive attitude of the Greek Cypriot delegation, led by President Clerides, was again met by the negative attitude and behaviour of the Turkish side.

The negative feeling was reinforced by the comments of the British permanent representative to the United Nations, who was the president of the Security Council at that time. After the briefing of Senor Diego Cordovez, who is the special adviser to the Secretary-General, on the outcome of the Glion talks, the British ambassador, Sir John Weston, said that

> "there was a sense of disappointment that it hadn't been possible in the event to make more progress at Glion."

From Sir John's remarks, it is clear that no fault attached to Senor Cordovez, and it was stressed that

> "commendation was due to President Clerides for the flexibility and co-operation that he had showed at this round of talks . . . there was . . . concern and disappointment that further substantive progress . . . was impeded by the attempt to bring preconditions to the table by the other party, and here of course I mean the Turkish Cypriots."

However, it was felt that

> "the two parties at the highest level do remain committed to the future of this process",

which is a hopeful sign for the future. Sir John said that that was

> "also the sense of the members of the Security Council."

Sir John made it clear that there was strong support and endorsement for

> "the Secretary-General's good offices mission in which Senor Cordovez plays an absolutely central part."

Everyone agrees that

> "The present status quo is unacceptable. There has to be further pursuit of the comprehensive settlement we all seek in accordance with Security Council Resolutions."

Sir John went on:

> "Nobody ever thought that this process was going to be easy . . . in these two rounds of talks at Troutbeck and at Glion there has in fact been some progress registered particularly at a practical level affecting humanitarian issues on the island of Cyprus."

On 31 July, there was an agreement about missing persons, which I am sure everyone with Cyprus's interests at heart welcomes. The Security Council expressed its approval of that. Sir John made it clear that it was essential

> "to move on to get to the next stage of doing the hard work that will make it possible to resume the process of negotiations between the parties directly."

Senor Cordovez has said that, as soon as next year's presidential elections in Cyprus are over, he intends to seek further progress and members of the Security Council "warmly supported" his intention to continue paying visits. However, the Security Council stressed how important it was that no one involved in the process

> "say or do things which were going to raise the level of tension further on the island or diminish the chances of making progress toward a peace settlement—that will call for good sense all around—we want to use the intervening weeks and months to see further progress made particularly on the humanitarian side."

It is, therefore, with great sadness that one reflects on the fact that there has recently been a great deal of air activity—buzzing—over the Republic of Cyprus by Turkish jets. Turkey has completely ignored what Sir John Weston said on behalf of the Security Council about not indulging in inflammatory acts. It is fair to say that Turkey's intransigence is nothing new. In his latest comprehensive report on Cyprus, submitted to the Security Council in May 1994, the former UN Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, stated that

> "the lack of any progress whatsoever is due to one fundamental reason: the lack of political will on the Turkish side".

Great difficulty has been caused by the many settlers from Anatolia, whom the Turkish regime has put into the occupied territories of northern Cyprus. They have no fundamental links with the area and all of us who know Cyprus recognise that the Turkish Cypriots resent the importation of those settlers. Another matter of great concern is the activity of the Turkish Grey Wolves organisation—I see the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) nodding—and the resulting deaths on the green line, which, as television pictures clearly showed, were witnessed by senior figures from Turkey.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Earlier in his speech, my hon. Friend was asked whether he had visited the northern part of Cyprus and he said that he had not. Does he accept that several hon. Members, including myself and some Labour Members, have crossed the green line to visit the north? We have spoken to members of the Turkish Cypriot community and have heard their real concern that the settlers to whom my hon. Friend referred are taking over their island. The Turkish Cypriots are becoming a minority in their own country and many have left and come to the United Kingdom. They are gravely concerned about their own future and the future of the whole island. Is it not desperately sad that some Members of this honourable House seek to give succour and comfort to the illegal regime in the north of Cyprus?

Mr. Hawkins: I quite agree. What my hon. Friend says has been reflected in my discussions with Turkish Cypriots who have come to this country for the very reasons that he mentions. My hon. Friend has had the advantage of visiting the occupied part of the island. I have not had the chance to do that, but I have talked to Turkish Cypriots in this country—

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that there are always two points of view in such situations? He has spoken of conditions in northern Cyprus, a place he has never visited, although he has visited the south. Is he aware that there are almost as many foreigners living in southern Cyprus as there are in northern Cyprus, for instance? There are thousands of Lebanese and thousands of Russians there, and many Greek Cypriots resent their presence. Indeed, many of them have had to leave and have come to live here in London in even larger numbers than have the Turkish Cypriots.

Mr. Hawkins: Judging by my visits to the legal regime in the Republic of Cyprus I would have to disagree with what the right hon. Gentleman says. I have detected no resentment; indeed, the inward investment that foreign visitors have brought to the Republic of Cyprus has been warmly welcomed. Based on my extensive discussions with many Greek Cypriots here, I know that although they choose to travel the world they always retain close links with the home island.

What is more, there is a huge difference between the importation to northern Cyprus of settlers from Anatolia who are imposed on the people of northern Cyprus against their will and the voluntary settling of visitors from abroad in southern Cyprus. It amounts to the difference between the dictatorial regime in the illegally occupied north and the free, democratic regime in the Republic of Cyprus.

As long as Turkey is working to an entirely different political agenda from that of the rest of the western world, and as long as the threat of partition and of the expansionist policies followed by the Turkish Government persists, the Cyprus Government have not only the right but the duty to protect their people from the military threat of Turkey. Although Cyprus's military capabilities cannot possibly match those of Turkey, its Government are trying to avoid a possible repetition of the 1974 conflict. President Clerides has repeatedly proposed the demilitarisation of Cyprus, which will include the withdrawal of foreign troops and the disbanding of local military forces, while an international force will be stationed in Cyprus for as long as necessary to ensure the implementation of the solution during the transitional period.

I should like to pay a tribute to one of the British service men serving with the UN force on the green line. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West and I, and other members of our delegation, met him during the summer when visiting the green line. The troops stationed there had not been warned of our coming. We were all impressed by the way this soldier spoke to us, and by his personal commitment to the island and to service with the United Nations. After 10 or 15 minutes of conversation with him, I was most impressed by how he took everything in his stride, including the dangers of serving in the divided island, and by his diplomacy and skill when faced with an unexpected delegation of Greek Cypriots and Members of this House. The episode served to reinforce my great admiration for all who serve in the British Army, and it contrasted sharply with some of the criminal incidents in which some members of Her Majesty's forces have been involved on the island. I believe that that episode shows those incidents to have been aberrations, and I remain very impressed by most members of the British forces.

As for the future, it is fair to say that everyone on the Security Council who has been involved in the issue recognises that Greek Cypriots in the republic are committed to a just and long-lasting solution in a bizonal, bicommunal federation—an idea accepted by both sides, theoretically, in the 1977 and 1979 high-level agreements. Such a solution would preserve the integrity of Cyprus as one sovereign state and as a state with one international personality as a matter of international law.

In order to bring about a just and long-lasting solution, I believe that the security aspects must be dealt with. A satisfactory solution to the problem of displaced persons must also be found. Human rights and basic freedoms should be safeguarded in accordance with the acquis communautaire and other international instruments of human rights.

In a recent UN communiqué, Heads of Government reaffirmed their support for the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and unity of the Republic of Cyprus, and called for the implementation of the UN resolutions on Cyprus, in particular Security Council resolutions 365 of 1974, 550 of 1984 and 939 of 1994. They regretted that negotiations on a solution have been at an impasse for far too long, and they strongly supported the process of direct intercommunal talks under the UN Secretary-General's mission of good offices.

The Heads of Government also expressed their concern at recent Turkish threats to use force and to integrate the occupied territory, and reiterated their support for President Clerides's demilitarisation proposals, calling for the withdrawal of all Turkish forces and settlers, the return of refugees to their homes, the restoration of and respect for the human rights of all Cypriots, and an accounting for all missing persons. They expressed their disappointment that progress had been impeded by the efforts of the Turkish Cypriot side to introduce preconditions to the talks; and called for a co-operative attitude by both sides so as to achieve a comprehensive, just and workable settlement on the basis of a bicommunal and bizonal federation.

While noting the existence of the Commonwealth action group on Cyprus, the Heads of Government also welcomed the initiative of the Commonwealth Secretary-General in nominating an observer at the UN-sponsored negotiations; and recognised that Britain, as a permanent member of the Security Council and a guarantor power, occupies a special position in the matter.

It is certainly true that many right hon. and hon. Members of all parties have taken a special interest in Cyprus. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) here; he is another friend of Cyprus with a long-standing interest in the island. Other hon. Members with an interest cannot be with us this morning, unfortunately. The Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry has told me that a ministerial engagement will prevent her from being here this morning, but she, too, has a long-standing interest. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) has a long-standing commitment to Cyprus and to a peaceful future for the island. The same applies to the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara), who has just come into the Chamber. I welcome them all.

I regret the recent actions of the Turkish side. In recent days, the newspapers have referred to a heightening of the tension. This comes as Richard Holbrooke, the American negotiator, was expected to call for a ban on all Greek and Turkish military flights over the island, in the hope of averting any fresh conflict. We hope and pray that there will be no fresh conflict, but it is extremely worrying to learn that Turkish aeroplanes have been violating Cyprus airspace. Fortunately, no shots were fired when Turkish aeroplanes buzzed the island.

There are, however, further regional and geo-political grounds for concern. There have been deteriorating relations between Turkey and Russia, apparently because

[Mr. Hawkins]

of covert Turkish military support for the Chechen separatists. Turkey has been issuing some rather unbelievable claims. Its recent claims that Russian missiles might be converted to ground-to-ground weapons capable of landing on the Turkish mainland have been ridiculed by western military experts, one of whom is quoted as saying:

> "It would be like buying a Porsche and trying to convert it into a snowplough."

However, we are worried that the Turkish regime has adopted a deliberately provocative attitude in the past. One only prays that Cyprus will have a peaceful future. I call on all hon. Members, on both sides of the House, who have a concern about Cyprus as an island and the future of all its people, whether of Turkish or Greek origin, to work together to participate in a solution for that still sadly divided island.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to address the House this morning.

9.59 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) on initiating the debate and on the presentation of his speech. He rightly said that many hon. Members on both sides of the House have for very many years worked together as a group for Cyprus and for the people of Cyprus, be they Turkish Cypriots or—

Mr. Maginnis *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cox: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but he is mistaken. Many hon. Members in the Chamber have repeatedly and consistently said, in speeches in the House and at meetings outside it, that their commitment is to the people of Cyprus, be they Greek or Turkish Cypriots. It is not good enough for the hon. Gentleman to deny that; the facts are on the record.

Rightly, we often debate Cyprus in the House. I chair the Commonwealth Parliamentary Cyprus Group—a group which comprises members from both Houses and all parties.

The long-running tragedy of Cyprus has continued for far too long. The invasion of the Republic of Cyprus by the Turkish army in 1974 was a flagrant abuse of the territory of a democratic country, a member state of the Commonwealth and a country of which the United Kingdom is a guarantor power.

Recalling the countless attempts that have been made since 1974 to find an honourable settlement, I—and, I am sure, many other hon. Members and Cypriots, be they Greek or Turkish—am filled with despair. There have been intercommunal talks and confidence-building measures. The United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union have sought to obtain a settlement in Cyprus—sadly, without success.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath spoke of the recent talks between President Clerides and Mr. Denktas in the United States and in Switzerland, and he commented on the statement made by the British ambassador, Sir John Weston. It conveys very well the frustration that a very senior diplomat feels on the issue. Following the failure of the talks, the European Union External Affairs Commissioner, Mr. Hans Van den Broek, said that he found it "unacceptable" for Mr. Denktas to demand that the European Union should freeze its plans for accession talks with Cyprus before further negotiations could go ahead. There we have two clear statements by prominent and powerful diplomats, who lay the blame squarely on Mr. Denktas and his colleagues for the absence of progress.

As I said when the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) shook his head, I, and I believe all of us who are committed to helping to find a solution in Cyprus, have always been committed to the rights of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to security and prosperity in what we seek—a united Cyprus. That said, although there has been enormous suffering among both Greek and Turkish Cypriots since 1974, obviously the Turkish Cypriot has suffered most. Undoubtedly, northern Cyprus has suffered far more than the Republic of Cyprus, and that is surely one reason why many of us continue to try, in the House and in other assemblies, to obtain an honourable settlement to end this long-running tragedy.

I mentioned the despair that many of us feel. If my hon. Friend the Minister were to ask his officials to write on the left-hand side of a piece of paper concessions made by the Greek Cypriots since 1974, and on the right those made by the Turkish Cypriots, he would find that the Greek Cypriots, under successive Presidents, have made all the concessions in Cyprus since 1974.

Mr. Maginnis: That is not true.

Mr. Cox: The hon. Gentleman says that it is not true. That is not borne out by the facts, which I shall outline.

Let us consider events since 1974. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath mentioned the thousands of Turkish troops stationed in the occupied north. Mr. Denktas has made no attempt to reduce the number of Turkish troops in the occupied area. We know of the enormous abuse that has taken place of the Greek Cypriot community living in the occupied area, in the Karpas region.

The late Lord Finsberg, who was a member of the Council of Europe, was required by the Council of Europe to report on conditions in northern Cyprus. He did so about 18 months ago, and described the enormous human rights abuses of those living in the occupied area. I shall not repeat his comments. They were an indictment of Mr. Denktas, revealing the conditions that he was imposing on those people.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath mentioned illegal settlers. In the early 1990s, the Council of Europe—to which I am a delegate—commissioned the Cou Cou report, which presented clear evidence of the thousands of mainland Turks brought in deliberately by Mr. Denktas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) and I are deeply concerned about Famagusta. Mr. Denktas deliberately reneged on a promise to hand back Famagusta to the Republic of Cyprus. About three years ago, I initiated a debate in the Chamber solely about Famagusta, and no one denied that he had done so. I never received a letter from Mr. Denktas or any of his supporters to say, "You were misleading the House." Mr. Denktas said that he would hand back Famagusta, but he never did.

Mr. Maginnis: But is not the handing back of the Varosha district of Famagusta, which is something that should have happened, linked with access to Nicosia airport and the provision of a terminal for northern Cypriots at that airport? Has that concession—a very important concession to the lifeline of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus—been given, or is there a willingness to give it?

Mr. Cox: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman says that Famagusta should be handed back and I am sure that that will be warmly welcomed in the Republic of Cyprus. No doubt the other supposed conditions to which he refers are the type of conditions that Mr. Denktas would seek to impose. We know that, in the context of the intercommunal talks and the confidence-building measures, all those issues were willingly and repeatedly discussed by the Republic of Cyprus. However, the Republic of Cyprus wanted the complete return of the town of Famagusta, not the half-issues that Mr. Denktas raised regarding its return. That has been the stumbling block.

Mr. Eddie O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that there were two proposals in the same set of proposals: one referred to Famagusta and the other to Nicosia airport being opened under United Nations supervision? Mr. Denktas, however, insisted on linking the opening of Famagusta with the opening of the airport on terms that would have meant a de facto recognition of the northern regime, contrary to the United Nations proposals.

Mr. Cox: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment.

The whole world was appalled by the brutal murder last year of three Greek Cypriots. Two of those murders were filmed on video. The fact that Mr. Denktas has done nothing to bring to justice those who committed the murders must be the most damning indictment that one can make of him.

We know what has happened since 1974. Where do we go now? The hon. Member for Surrey Heath referred to Richard Holbrooke, the United States special envoy. Our special envoy is Sir David Hannay, and obviously they both work closely together. What settlement are those two special envoys seeking for Cyprus? Will territory that was taken in the 1974 invasion be returned? Will property and land, much of which is now occupied by illegal settlers, be returned? Will those living on the island of Cyprus, be they Greek or Turkish, be able to live or move wherever they wish within the island? Is that the kind of settlement that those two special envoys, with the assistance of the United Nations and other organisations such as the Council of Europe and the European Union, want to achieve? Does the Minister have any idea, from the discussions that Sir David Hannay will have had with Mr. Denktas, whether Mr. Denktas is genuinely willing to negotiate such a settlement—or will he impose new conditions as a deliberate attempt to stall meaningful discussions that would lead to a settlement, as he did in the recent talks?

Both Greek and Turkish Cypriots are more than capable of developing and forming the Government that they would want in a united Cyprus. I am sure that they have the ability to develop their country both socially and economically. But until we get over the hurdle, which we have been unable to get over since 1974, we must wonder where to go from here.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath referred to something of crucial importance: Cyprus's application for membership of the European Union. He said, as did the European External Affairs Commissioner, that membership of the European Union can only benefit Cyprus and its people, be they Greek or Turkish. No one in the House would disagree with that. We cannot allow Mr. Denktas repeatedly to delay discussion, then threaten to take the occupied area of Cyprus into mainland Turkey. I hope that the Minister will give a clear statement this morning on Britain's attitude to the possibility that Turkey will annex the northern area of a member state of the Commonwealth—a country for which we are a guarantor power. What would we, the European Union and the Americans do? Many hon. Members would not be prepared to sit in this Chamber and say, "It is regrettable, but these things happen." It would be totally unacceptable. We hear such threats being made repeatedly, not only by Mr. Denktas but by senior Turkish politicians.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath made another valid point when he referred to the continued infringement of Cypriot airspace by Turkish aircraft. We know that that happens. I have asked questions on that issue in the Western European Union and said that we hope that both sides will cool the issue, but only one side—Turkey—is creating the provocation. That is yet another example of the enormous dilemma that the Government face.

I do not agree with all the efforts that were made by the previous Administration, but I genuinely believe that they wanted a settlement. We cannot allow the problem to continue. For 23 years, a Commonwealth country with a democratically elected Government has been occupied by a foreign power and we do nothing about it. The so-called "independent state" was initiated by Mr. Denktas years ago, but only one country—Turkey—still recognises it. If Mr. Denktas has created such a wonderful state, one would have thought that by now a number of countries would recognise it.

Cyprus is a small, beautiful country. Hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber will agree that, with a settlement and with membership of the European Union, within about five years Cyprus could become one of the most prosperous countries in Europe. We cannot, however, allow the problem to continue year after year. The British Government cannot say, "It is regrettable. We have tried but have got nowhere, because we have substantial interests in Cyprus. We cannot simply hope that we shall get a settlement one day.

I hope that, in the coming months, we shall see real progress towards a settlement. I have no doubt about the kind of Cyprus that I want. I want a united Cyprus where the rights of Greek and Turkish Cypriots are honoured and where security is safeguarded, and I want Cyprus to become a member of the European Union. We cannot allow Mr. Denktas to continue to stall and delay a settlement that could have been reached years ago. I hope that the Government are fully committed to achieving an honourable settlement as soon as possible.

10.17 am

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): I have been a visitor to Cyprus since 1972. I have not taken part in many of the debates on Cyprus in recent years, but I have watched

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the subject closely because I have a cottage there—properly declared and bought from a Greek Cypriot in 1972 as, at that time, there were only two administrations on the island of Cyprus. Those were the Cyprus Government, which we recognised, and the United Kingdom sovereign bases. Strangely enough, they have not been mentioned by the previous two speakers.

I saw how the Turkish Cypriot community was being treated—not very well. I saw the Greeks in Athens increasing the pressure for enosis between Cyprus and Greece and, finally, the Greeks overthrowing the independent sovereign nation of Cyprus and its Greek Cypriot President Makarios, and imposing Nikos Sampson on the people of that island. Then there was the request by one of the guarantor powers—Turkey—to the United Kingdom to join it to repulse the Greek takeover of Cyprus and the Greek demolition of the constitution of Cyprus. The Labour Government of that time failed to respond to that request, as we all know, and finally Turkey, as a guarantor power, intervened in 1974.

I had hoped that the debate would be concerned with the interests of both the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots. In fairness to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), he did at times stress that his concern was to assist both communities. I was terribly disappointed by the speech of the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), who was clearly biased, one-sided and bigoted in his interpretation of events in that island.

Mr. O'Hara: Before the right hon. Gentleman moves on, will he recognise that what happened in 1974 was an aborted coup d'état supported by a discredited fascist Government in Greece, who subsequently fell; that Nikos Sampson was deposed from his temporary position and imprisoned by the proper authorities of Cyprus when the proper Government were restored; and that although, under the treaty of guarantee, Turkey might have the right to intervene, that right of intervention ceased when the status quo was restored?

Mr. Taylor: We could argue for years about what happened. I heard some criticism of the Labour Government's action at that time. I supported some of the things that that Government did at the time.

To respond to the hon. Gentleman's point, it is true that, following the overthrow of Archbishop Makarios by the Greeks in Athens, the imposed dictatorship in Cyprus collapsed as a result of the Turkish intervention in Cyprus. Incidentally, not only did the dictatorship in Cyprus collapse, but the colonels' fascist regime in Greece collapsed and democracy was restored to Greece as a result of those events. We could reinterpret history for hours if we went on.

Mr. Hawkins: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Taylor: No, I want to carry on, as time is running out.

There are at present three administrations in Cyprus, whether we recognise them or like them. There is the Greek Cypriot administration in the south, the Turkish Cypriot administration in the north and the British sovereign administration in Episkopi, Akrotiri and Dhekelia.

As the hon. Member for Tooting said, Cyprus is one of the most beautiful places in Europe. That is why I chose to have a cottage there. At that time, the area was Greek Cypriot. The village that I am in was 50 per cent. Greek Cypriot and 50 per cent. Turkish Cypriot. It is now 100 per cent. Turkish Cypriot. There are some mainlanders there as well, but the people are mostly Turkish Cypriots. The Greek Cypriots had to go. However, the Turkish Cypriots who came into the village also had to go—from southern Cyprus. The Greeks put them out and they had to come into northern Cyprus. Many of them came from Paphos and Limassol.

In this context, I praise the Labour Government of the day. After the Greek coup and the intervention of the Turkish troops, Turkish Cypriots in their thousands were locked up for months in boiling heat and the most inhuman conditions in football stadiums in Limassol and Paphos. Only through the intervention of the then Prime Minister, Mr. Callaghan, were those Turkish Cypriots released from those inhuman conditions and allowed free passage into northern Cyprus, where they now live.

Many of the people whom I know in the village formerly lived in southern Cyprus but had to escape, leaving behind their homes, property, businesses and jobs, and come penniless up into northern Cyprus, but at least they got freedom as a result of the intervention of the then Labour Government.

It is right to say that the division of Cyprus is most unfortunate. We want a settlement in that island. We must ask ourselves what a nation is. Is a nation just an area of land, or is a nation a people with a distinct culture, a religion and a history? The former right hon. Member for South Down, Enoch Powell, speaking on the subject in the House, said that he considered the Turkish Cypriots to be a nation, because under the definition, they qualify as a nation and a people.

Coming from the island of Ireland, I realise the problems of divisions among the different nations that share an island. In the island of Cyprus there are two nations: the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots. The United Kingdom recognised that at the time of the Zurich and London agreements in 1959–60. That is why we built into the then constitution an extremely complicated system of government and power sharing in the assembly in Nicosia. It collapsed because it was far too complicated. Perhaps there is a lesson there for Northern Ireland as it considers its future.

I was disturbed to hear some of the accusations thrown at Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots today. With regard to Cyprus joining the European Union, I agree with the hon. Member for Tooting, who said that if Cyprus joined the European Union, it would bring even greater advantages to the Turkish Cypriots than to the Greek Cypriots. That is true, because the Turkish Cypriots are a much poorer section of the Cyprus community than are the Greek Cypriots.

One of the reasons for that is that since 1974, all moneys from the World bank, the European Community and other international organisations have gone only to the Greek Cypriot administration. The Turkish Cypriots have been denied funding from those international organisations. I remember dealing with the matter when

I was a Member of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. That state of affairs is contrary to clause 5 of the association agreement between Cyprus and the European Union, which specifically stated that both communities were to benefit fairly from European funds invested in the island.

Membership of the EU would be beneficial, but we in the EU should not wish to bring into our community an unsettled and divided Cyprus. It would be terrible for the European Union to inherit the problem. The division of Cyprus affects not just Cyprus, but Turkey, Greece and the future of the relationships in the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean. It has major security and political implications for NATO, the EU and the middle east.

The situation is becoming serious because of the new military agreement between the Greek sector and Greece. It has been mentioned—it is always mentioned—that there are Turkish troops in northern Cyprus, but none of the previous speakers was honest enough also to state that there are Greek mainland troops in southern Cyprus, in total contradiction of the terms of the Zurich and London agreements, which provided for 1,000 Greek troops to be in southern Cyprus. There are many more, but there is no condemnation of that, and no mention of the fact that Greece now has military bases in southern Cyprus, in contravention of the Zurich and London agreements.

We hear about one or two Turkish aeroplanes, apparently flying over Greek Cypriot airspace. That is what is alleged. It may have happened, but, as I said earlier, there are always two sides to the story. To be fair, we must examine both. I ask the Minister to respond to reports that Greek military and Greek Cypriot military aeroplanes have entered British airspace in Akrotiri and Dhekelia and that Her Majesty's Government have protested to the authorities in Nicosia and in Athens about those armed flights over British sovereign territory. Will the Minister confirm those reports?

I support Cyprus's membership of the European Union, but I believe that Brussels has bungled the issue. I support the United Nations initiative to bring the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots together. In July this year, Greek Cypriots returned for the first time to the village in which my little cottage is located. It was nice to see them back—if only for a one-day visit. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath said that when he visited southern Cyprus he could not visit northern Cyprus. That is not correct: people can cross into northern Cyprus from the south for at least one day and sometimes for a week. People cannot enter the south from northern Cyprus, but the Turkish Cypriots allow people to enter northern Cyprus—so one party is more generous than the other.

The United Nations has made progress, and Mr. Clerides and Mr. Denktas have met on the two occasions mentioned. Some humanitarian progress has been made on the issue of missing persons, and there has been some inter-community co-operation socially, with visits to villages and to the St. Andreas monastery in the Karpas. It is very upsetting to see that area so depressed—but many things in Cyprus are upsetting. Mosques in southern Cyprus have been destroyed and Muslim graveyards have been desecrated. Greek Orthodox churches have also been desecrated in northern Cyprus.

There is fault on both sides—there are always two sides to the story in Cyprus. We must consider both, rather than peddling the propaganda of only one side—particularly if that side has paid for a nice freebie visit to southern Cyprus or to the north. Both administrations bring people to their areas in an attempt to win them over to their point of view—and they often succeed. I assure hon. Members that I have never had a free trip to northern Cyprus: I travel at my own expense.

I think that Mr. Clerides and Mr. Denktas can deliver a settlement in Cyprus. I would be worried if both gentlemen left the political scene causing a leadership vacuum. Strong leadership is essential if there is to be a settlement—we know that from events on the island of Ireland. As progress was being made, Brussels intervened and announced that negotiations would begin on the accession of Cyprus to the European Union and that that would proceed with or without a settlement in Cyprus.

Mr. Gale: The right hon. Gentleman's representation of the situation in Cyprus is a travesty. He has failed so far to justify the presence of some 40,000 Turkish troops on the northern part of the island or of some 80,000 illegal settlers. The continued presence of those people for 23 years has nothing to do with the aborted coup of 1974. Does the right hon. Gentleman claim that that illegal regime in what he refers to as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus—no one else recognises it—should be allowed to hold to ransom the island's entry into the European Union? If he does, I assure him that many hon. Members would profoundly disagree.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I remind the House that quite a few hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. It is only a short debate, so any interventions should be very brief.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Members who have spoken this morning have, as usual, supported the Greek Cypriots and adopted a one-sided view of the Cyprus issue. In referring to the number of foreigners—mainly Turks—in northern Cyprus, the hon. Gentleman refuses to accept that, according to British figures, 35,000 foreigners now live in southern Cyprus. He mentions the presence of Turkish troops in northern Cyprus, but he refuses to condemn the presence of Greek mainland troops in southern Cyprus.

The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) asked whether the Turkish Cypriots should be able to veto Cyprus's membership of the European Union. However, the United Kingdom has always agreed, through the Zurich and London agreements, that the Turkish Cypriots should have a veto over the system of government in Cyprus and its membership of any international organisations. The Zurich and London agreements make it clear that Cyprus cannot join any organisation unless Greece and Turkey are also members. Even when the sovereign state of Cyprus existed—before the Greek coup—we accepted the principle that the Turkish Cypriots could exercise a veto over the future of that island. The hon. Gentleman now rejects the terms accepted by British Governments of both political persuasions for a settlement in Cyprus.

I conclude by raising another serious point, which the previous speakers failed to mention. The Greek Cypriots have decided to purchase S300 missiles from Russia and to place them in military bases in the south of Cyprus. That is a most serious development, which has major implications for peace on the island of Cyprus and for

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relations between Greece and Turkey. The development must concern other members of NATO and western powers generally.

I ask the Minister to confirm whether the United Kingdom has made any representations about the proposed establishment of those missiles in southern Cyprus. Have we complained about that move? Do we accept that it is contrary to the Zurich and London agreements regarding the militarisation of any part of Cyprus? If representations have been made, what form have they taken?

10.36 am

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I add my congratulations to those offered to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) on securing this debate on our return from the summer recess. As I sponsored the first debate on the subject this Session, I shall be brief.

The world moves on, but the division of Cyprus remains. After 23 years of failure, the capacity of the international community to remedy the injustice done to the people of Cyprus is at stake. I have just returned from a visit to the island—my third in as many years—during which, like the hon. Member for Surrey Heath, I went to the green line which separates the two communities. I saw for myself the tragedy of Cyprus's continuing division. People cannot return to their homes and villages, community members are separated from their families and friends, and the issue of the missing relatives remains.

Presidential elections on the island are due to take place in February next year. Uncertainty about their outcome has inevitably delayed direct negotiations between the two communities, but it should not prevent their representatives or those of the international community from preparing the ground for the resumption of talks early next year.

Although the talks earlier this year failed to move the process forward, I am pleased to see that President Clerides and Mr. Denktas have continued to meet in Cyprus. Those meetings have raised hopes that several confidence-building measures will be addressed. The question of the fate of the missing on both sides—the innocent victims of the military invasion—may finally be laid to rest, enabling families and friends to come to terms with their loss.

The dialogue between the two leaders has also encompassed discussion of various security concerns and the mounting tensions in the region. That is a direct consequence both of the division of the island and of the continuing presence of foreign troops to underpin it. That division creates instability, which leads to escalating tension and friction, not only in Cyprus but between Greece and Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean. Because of that tension, we are beginning to see the unravelling of the Madrid agreement between those two countries, so patiently put together earlier this year with the help of the Americans. Whether it be the cat and mouse game currently played out in the skies over Cyprus, including the buzzing of the Greek Defence Minister on a recent trip to the island, or the threat and counter-threat surrounding missiles and troop deployments, the problem remains essentially the same. It was summed up succinctly by a western diplomat:

"What one side sees as security is interpreted as insecurity by the other side."

Although I accept that the current dialogue is unlikely to address any of the fundamental issues—that can happen only when proper negotiations resume—it is to be hoped that they can foster at least a better atmosphere in Cyprus and, more optimistically, perhaps an agreement that will help to reduce tensions.

It is, of course, to the resumption of UN-sponsored negotiations that we must look for a resolution, and to the European Community and the negotiations of Cyprus's accession. Britain assumes the presidency in January next year and will be in the chair when they commence. In that regard, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his reaffirmation during yesterday's Foreign and Commonwealth questions that the Government will continue to support its application for membership on its merits and without preconditions.

Britain must also help to make the case for membership. It will benefit both communities, not only by providing an impetus to both economies and ending the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community, but, perhaps most important, by helping to guarantee the security of all Cypriots, which remains by far the most difficult issue to resolve. Britain must also honour its obligations. We are uniquely placed, because of our historic role in the island, as a member of the Security Council of the UN, and as a guarantor power of the security of the island. Therefore, we must leave no stone unturned in our efforts as a country to work both with the community and at the United Nations for a resumption of meaningful negotiations. We owe that commitment to the people of Cyprus.

10.42 am

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Time is extremely short, so I shall be brief. I know that there are powerful advocates on both sides of the House who have greater expertise on the subject than me. My only plea is that their advocacy of a proper settlement in Cyprus should recognise the needs of both communities on the island and recognise that each community has genuine fears and concerns about the attitude of the other, and the other countries that are involved in the area.

When we last debated this matter, we were looking forward to the United Nations mediation and to the activities of Mr. Cordovez. We were hoping that that would bring about a fundamental change in the position. Sadly, that has not yet happened, but we must still be hopeful that it will happen in the near future and that the United Nations mediation will bear fruit. That has not been helped by the noises off and within. Many hon. Members have referred to sabre rattling, which has come from a number of quarters, whether it is the overflying of military aircraft, the purchase of missiles or the threats of veto and counter-veto, through which external forces are seeking to apply pressure, or whether it is the noises from within, from both communities—principally Mr. Denktas in this case—in threatening to obstruct Cyprus's accession, which seems very much to be in its interest.

The Government's position was clearly stated in the debate in June. We were asked to support a comprehensive political settlement in Cyprus, establishing a bizonal, bicommunal federation comprising two politically equal communities. That must, of course, remain the case. All parts of the House must support that view. It is my contention that the British position must change a little. Until now, we have, quite properly, supported the United Nations in its efforts, but we are moving on to the British presidency. The talks may or may not be floundering, and the British position as a guarantor nation must come to the front.

Cyprus—particularly northern Cyprus—would benefit from accession to the EU. I believe that the EU would also benefit, because of the importance of Cyprus in strategic and commercial terms in the eastern Mediterranean. During its presidency, the British Government must seek to unravel the complications that are undoubtedly there. There may be legal impediments. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) brushed aside the legal arguments attached to the 1960 treaty; nevertheless, we need sensible answers to the question whether the treaty obligations have been repudiated. We need sensible answers on Turkey's position. We would all welcome, of course, Turkey's eventual accession to the EU, but we all know that there are very strong reasons why it has not yet shown itself to be an appropriate member of that family of nations. We must be clear that outside interests cannot veto the entry of Cyprus to the EU. Nor should outside interests seek to use accession to apply pressure elsewhere in the process, therefore interfering with the prospects of other countries seeking to accede.

This is a diplomatic tightrope. I do not envy the Minister in this respect, but I believe that Britain now has to give a clear lead. I ask the Minister simply to give some indication of where Britain intends to lead in the matter of Cyprus during the British presidency—what was Britain's position at Mondorf-le-Bains, for example?—how the British Government were able to react to the demands of the other Foreign Ministers at that meeting, and how they see Cyprus's application moving forward, which is something that I believe every hon. Member earnestly wishes to happen.

10.48 am

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) on bringing this debate to the House today. The House is well aware of his long-standing interest in and knowledge of Cyprus, and he displayed his usual insight and clarity in marshalling his arguments. Despite the rather unpleasant lashing that he received from the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), it was right that he should bring his recent experiences to the House so that it might be better informed.

I shall make a short speech and make three points from the view of Her Majesty's Opposition. First, we will, of course, continue to support the important work done by Sir David Hannay, who was appointed by the previous Government in May 1996. We pay tribute to his painstaking work and to the work of all the officials from the United Nations, the European Union and the United States who are involved in seeking a solution to this vexing question. We recognise that a solution lies in the bizonal, bicommunal federation, but it is disappointing that, although the leaders of both communities can agree on the end results, they are not yet able to agree on any steps towards that objective. We hope that they will.

Secondly, we support strongly the application by the Government of Cyprus for accession to the European Union. We very much hope that it will be a catalyst for settlement of this long-standing difficulty. It has certainly been a catalyst for enhanced debate and activity. We make it clear that we are strongly of the view that there is no Turkish veto over the accession.

We are sure that the process of membership of the European Union will be of great benefit to everyone on the island. It is clear that membership would be of enormous significance to foreign investment and to the restoration of full international links. It would provide a significant boost to the tourism sector. Substantial cohesion payments would be available, and that would be of no small benefit to the people on the island.

We welcome the commencement of accession talks in the next few months. We shall do all that we can to support them. We see the British presidency of the EU as an opportunity for the debate to be moved forward helpfully and constructively.

We repeat the call on the leaders of the Government of Cyprus and on Turkish Cypriots to make a fresh effort to find a solution on behalf of all the people. We, the Opposition, want to make it clear that we support any reasonable initiative that is taken by the new Government of the United Kingdom to bring about peace and stability in the region.

I have one simple question for the Minister—I am sure that it will not trouble him greatly. Is he able to clarify whether it remains Government policy to support the rotating presidency, which, when stated earlier in the year, caused some difficulty with the Government of Cyprus? Perhaps the Minister will make his policy on that issue clear.

I wish to conclude where I started, by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath on his important speech.

Mr. Maginnis: It is unfortunate that time has permitted only one Member to speak from a different point of view. I am grateful, of course, to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene. Will he clarify whether he still recognises that the Turkish Cypriots, under the 1960 constitution, have a veto on the position of Cyprus vis-à-vis accession to the European Union?

Mr. Streeter: I thought that I made the position clear earlier. We do not see Turkey—

Mr. Maginnis: No; Turkish Cypriots, not Turkey.

Mr. Streeter: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no.

It is important that all points of view are heard in the House and—

Mr. Maginnis: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Streeter: I shall not give way again because time is so short.

In debating this issue, it is important that all points of view are heard in the House, but it is unfortunate that my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath was lashed in an unpleasant way for bringing his recent experience to the House and informing our debate.

Finally, we must all wish all of those involved in an important process every success in reaching a lasting and peaceful solution.

10.52 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): I, too, am mindful of the time. I shall not be able to take up all the points raised in the debate in my reply, but I shall be happy to deal in other ways with any points that I miss.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) on raising the debate. It is clear that the issue is of great interest to the House, to our nation and to the people of Cyprus.

I thank the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) for his supportive remarks on the nature of a future constitution for Cyprus and on European Union accession. I thank him also for his remark that the Opposition will support any reasonable initiative that is taken by the Government. I assure the hon. Gentleman that all our initiatives are reasonable and that he will have many from which to choose in the months ahead.

As for the rotating presidency, I perceive no change in policy. The future constitution should principally concern the main participants, but obviously the guarantors and others have a view. If a mutual agreement were reached of such a nature that it caused major difficulties elsewhere, the Government would express their concerns. I do not envisage any particular problem in that area.

We had a wide debate on Cyprus in June and not a great deal has changed since then. Talks have taken place, of course, on two occasions during the summer. It is disappointing that more progress was not made for they provided an excellent opportunity for progress. At least the parties still recognise that there is a need for them to have a dialogue. I hope that that recognition will carry forward through the winter beyond the elections in southern Cyprus in February so that we can get down to the hard work that will ensue in the early months of next year.

I am happy to announce that, during the British presidency, Sir David Hannay will be the presidency representative on these matters as well as our own special representative.

During my recent visit to Turkey, in my talks with the Greek Government and during my visit to Mondorf-le-Bains over the weekend I expressed the view—I do not have time to go into the details—that the people of Cyprus can all gain if there is a solution to the current divide and the current difficulties. Factors that cause tension and put obstacles in the way of seeking peace and securing a settlement must be condemned.

I have made it clear to the Turkish Government that the British Government support Turkey's inclusion in the European conference for reasons that were referred to partially during Question Time yesterday. We have said to the Turkish Government that, if they want to be part of the European family, we expect a constructive approach from Turkey on a wide range of issues, including relationships with Greece and the influence that they, the Turkish Government, can bring to bear on the northern part of Cyprus.

Mr. Maginnis: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Henderson: I am not giving way because I do not have time to do so.

Similarly, I have said to the Greek Government that we want them to do what they can to persuade the people in southern Cyprus that they, the people, must do what they can to reduce tension. We have said that we do not think it helpful to have any build-up of any military hardware on the island of Cyprus, including missiles, which it is proposed to operate from the southern part of the island.

The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) referred to overflights of the southern base areas. I can confirm that air clearance is normally required for such overflights. A small number of overflights occurred during recent exercises without such permission being given. We reminded the Cypriot Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the requirement.

There has been a much more general démarche adopted by the British Government involving all the parties that have been involved in increasing military tension in the area. It is time that that stopped. The people of the whole of Cyprus must learn that the world moves on. If the peoples of eastern and central Europe and of South Africa and elsewhere can respond to a new world situation, surely the people of the whole of the island of Cyprus can respond to that new situation.

One of the necessary responses is to de-escalate military involvement. We have complained in specific terms to both the Government of the southern part of Cyprus and to those who are in control in the north. We have told them that we take exception to the dangerous military exercises that are taking place. We have expressed the same view to the Turkish and Greek Governments, who have provided the forces.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) was right to talk about the future. Where do we go from here? There are no easy answers. It would help if the House did not bicker about the past and instead looked to the future, as that approach would help in Cyprus. We must have a more positive attitude. The EU accession talks will be driven forward by the British presidency as fast as is appropriate in relation to the other accession talks that are taking place. We desperately want to see success in the peace talks next spring. I commend Sir David Hannay, our special representative, for his hard work and dedication in pursuing that end.

At the end of the day, it is the parties in Cyprus who must bring peace. We know that a bizonal, bicommunal approach to the constitution can work, and humanitarian measures can be taken in the interim. De-manning of the green line, dealing with the missing persons issue and expansion of contacts, including cultural, social and sporting contacts, can happen on the way to a peace settlement. Ultimately, the parties must recognise that the big prize is peace, prosperity and stability for all, and for that they must work out a common solution with which they can all live.

Sport Hunting

11 am

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): The purpose of my speech is not to detract from the Second Reading on 28 November of the Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill to be presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster): quite the opposite.

I first began to think about the problems of sport hunting when I was taken by an Anglia Television crew to a fox hunt in Essex last Christmas. I found the whole day rather boring; there was not a fox in sight. The day came and went without me understanding why people commit themselves to this activity. The only sad event that occurred was a young rider falling off her horse, and that was about it. I was subjected to many of the arguments on the need for hunting. We were all courteously treated and there was no attempt to restrict our movements.

I determined to investigate this issue from a certain angle. My profession has taught me that scientific experimentation and analysis, as well as adding new dimensions to complex matters, can chase away prejudice, so it was to the scientific facts that I turned. My aim today is to ensure that recent scientific studies are discussed and that we use good science to cut through the emotion and nonsense that often surrounds this issue.

Research on sport hunting, which is often undertaken in difficult circumstances, has allowed organisations to make informed decisions on sport hunting, such as to ban it on their land as the National Trust announced earlier this year. That is truly an example of facts promoting political action.

Research has also made it possible to answer questions on the biological effects of hunting; specifically to question the contention that there is a dire need to restrict animal populations by this or any other method. Most hunters agree that hunting with hounds has little effect on hare, deer or fox numbers. I have always found it surprising that some animals are seen as pests or vermin, whereas others—or even sometimes the same animals—evoke human emotion, concern and passion. I note the recent study by the university of Bristol that was quoted in yesterday's *The Guardian*, which questions whether the fox is a pest.

Whether in biotechnology, with its immense potential for job and product creation, or in the field that encompasses ethology, biodiversity, management and conservation of wildlife, multifactorial components interact in complex ways that are often difficult to unravel and quantify. There is no common currency—a topical subject this week—with which to equate units of suffering, units of hedgerow, units of rural employment, units of cultural heritage and units of rural infrastructure. Hon. Members will instantly recognise those as major factors referred to in debates on hunting.

It is important to recognise that even after the science is applied and assessed, it is not the role of the scientist exclusively to apply ethical judgments. That is by no means to concede or imply that scientists are dispassionate, cold people—quite the opposite in my experience—who should not participate in such ethical debates and thereby fashion political judgment.

A wider debate is required, whether it is to do with poor old Dolly the sheep or with sport hunting. I hope that the matter is resolved democratically later this year through the Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill. Ultimately, a judgment must emerge from the whole equation and the scientific impact is essential if that is to happen. What scientific evidence has emerged, what is needed and how does it help us to judge the impact of hunting on the various factors at issue?

Hunting as a form of exploitation of wildlife may relate to conservation issues. Trophy hunting of big cats or the ivory harvest of elephants may affect global diversity, national economics and the recreational and employment profiles of a large segment of many societies. Other hunting issues may seem parochial in comparison but still involve a complex interplay between similar factors.

Scientific methodology, technique and analysis can be applied to the issues involved in our interaction with other natural creatures, be they foxes, hounds, hares, deer or mink. The anti-science lobby, which is fairly prevalent in this country, tells us that any scientific conclusion is merely common sense or that scientists never agree so their results should be disregarded and we should not bother about any of the evidence that is presented. That fails to recognise the immense socio-economic advances that have accrued since the discovery of DNA, electrons and the second law of thermodynamics. Such discoveries not only address issues of wealth creation, but can ensure an improvement in the quality of life and in our understanding of the environment. The intellectual and financial wealth created by such discoveries is incontestable and it ill behoves any Minister to deny the value of research.

How can science resolve some of the current problems in sport hunting? First, it can break down the prevalent mythology. A recent publication from the university of Durham said:

> "The mink's reputation as a pest lends considerable support to those who now hunt it with hounds along Britain's rivers. Conservationists fear, however, that the continuation of this activity, albeit directed towards a different species, seriously disturbs any otters which remain in the areas around."

So the simple branding of an organism as a pest fails to examine the whole ecosphere and the effects on other organisms in that environment.

Like Professor Bateson's report on stag hunting for the National Trust, scientific research has reinforced what the anti-hunt lobby had suspected all along: that hunting deer with hounds leads to unacceptable cruelty and suffering. Only last week, DNA profiling or fingerprinting resulted in four men being convicted of badger digging offences. Science showed its worth in that area and forensic diagnosis is very much part of our way of life in other activities. We cannot cherry-pick the science just to get our beliefs across: we must consider the whole dimension.

We can address issues of cruelty and pain scientifically. Such arguments are a prominent feature of the hunting debate. Pain or biotechnical trauma has been measured in the hunting of red deer. The National Trust recently commissioned a significant report by Professor Patrick Bateson and Elizabeth Bradshaw of King's college Cambridge, who were studying the effect of hunting on red deer in Exmoor and the Quantocks.

The study involved taking blood samples from deer that had been chased by hounds and then shot. The deer had run an average of 20 km over three hours. The research showed clearly that cortisol levels—it is acknowledged across the scientific compass that this hormone is released

[Dr. Ian Gibson]

under stress—blood sugar and lactate levels rose as oxygen levels fell due to overworked muscles. Red blood cells broke down and released haemoglobin, and muscle-based enzymes leaked into the blood.

Cortisol levels were 10 times higher in deer chased by hounds than in animals shot by stalkers. Blood lactate levels reached peak levels after 5 km of chase, then dropped as lactate was used to fuel muscular activity. The consequence was that after 15 km to 30 km, energy stores in the deer were completely depleted. That was described by many scientists as an extraordinary and unexpected finding. Another incidental observation was that blood plasma in the deer contained haemoglobin within a few kilometres of the start of the chase.

We must identify and calibrate factors that are amenable to scientific analysis for each situation. We are unlikely to reach ethical agreements from this evidence alone, but it allows us to quantify and assess stress levels and relate that to cruelty claims.

As we expect in science, several attempts have been made to discredit Bateson's work, but it has been peer reviewed and stood the test of conference scrutiny. Therefore, it can truly be described as pioneering, illustrative and conclusive at this stage.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the scientific way in which he is dealing with the issue. I do not claim to be a scientist, but it strikes me that the Bateson report is based entirely on the physical aspect of stress that he has just described so accurately. Does anything in the report suggest that that physical stress manifests itself as mental distress? It seems to me, as a layman, that that is the key aspect of an animal's pain.

Dr. Gibson: It is difficult to answer that question without the evidence provided by measurements involving brain cells and how they function, but I note in today's papers claims that cortisone levels relate to malfunctioning of the brain. Although Bateson did not carry out such measurements, I think that most scientists and medics would look for behavioural effects and effects on the brains of the deer. Certainly there are muscular effects, in that the deer become exhausted when running.

When reading the vast body of literature about hunting—we must admit that there is a sporting element in all such activity, whether it be fox hunting, hare coursing or red deer hunting—I have been struck by the quasi-scientific propaganda and dogma associated with the issues and by the nebulous phrases that are employed. Mythology and perceptions abound. Scientific investigations can cut through all that and provide qualitative and quantitative data, thereby giving a basis for political decision making.

We must get rid of our anthropomorphic attitude to animals. We have consciences and know right from wrong; animals do not. It is ludicrous to describe the fox—as some hunters have—as a cruel killer that kills for fun. Such language muddies the arguments. The notion that the kill is quick, lasting a matter of seconds, does not always stand up to scrutiny. Moreover, fox and deer hunts can involve chases lasting hours.

What other research has been conducted and what questions have been asked? Some questions relate to the organisation, activity patterns and modus operandi of hunting. Asking and investigating such questions involves assessing the scale of hunting and its role in rural socio-economic infrastructures. Some interesting answers are contained in in-depth studies of fox hunting by Doctors MacDonald and Johnstone of Oxford university, which are widely renowned. Among their many conclusions was the finding that the number of participants did not vary significantly from one region to another. About 80 people would participate in a typical hunt. Another finding was that the area covered by the hunt varied from larger areas in the south and midlands to smaller areas in the north and Wales. Cub hunting occurred on an average of 25 days per season and hunting proper on an average of 70.

The researchers went on to ask what role hunting played in the population dynamics of any species—in this instance the fox—what impact it had on countryside management; what and who were the interest groups; how they viewed the hunted and how they dealt with scientific factors when they emerged. To assess the population dynamics, mortality and movement of foxes and to establish the size of the populations and the different habitats, the researchers collected figures that showed the national average annual rate of fox kills by hunts for the past three decades. A slight upward trend emerged in the more recent data, especially in the south.

Consistent differences were recorded in the number of foxes found by hunts in different habitats: for example, it was claimed that there were more in hilly landscapes. Most important, thorough analysis of fox mortality using various methods showed, in summary, how little was due to the hunts. MacDonald's seminal work concludes:

> "As a method of protecting game birds, arguably the main motive for fox control, fox hunting is not sufficient. It seems similarly unlikely to offer protection for lambs."

It also states that

> "outside perhaps the context of upland sheep farming areas, fox hunting should be thought to be more of a sport than as a method of fox control."

MacDonald's work has been published and internationally acknowledged.

A more recent biological study from the university of Bristol concludes:

> "Foxes do not warrant their reputation as major pests of agriculture.
>
> Losses of lambs, piglets and poultry are insignificant relative to other causes of deaths. Greater improvements in lamb survival can be made by improving husbandry rather than by fox control."

I shall now deal with the impact of sport hunting on the countryside. A recent letter in the *Eastern Daily Press* highlighted a view in Norfolk that might have been justified until recently, but will not necessarily last for ever. The author wrote:

> "My late father came to this farm in 1944. On 250 acres there are today 12 arable fields, 10 small pasture fields, 3 woods, 11 spinneys, 4 ponds and a large number of hedges, banks and ditches".

The author went on to say that, had her father not been a hunting and shooting enthusiast, he would have removed them in the 1950s, when farmers were offered incentives to increase the productivity of their land. She felt that, without country sports, there would be seven ordinary arable fields, tiny areas of marsh and a few roadside banks.

Whether country sports will continue to be a major factor in countryside conservation remains to be seen. As MacDonald says, in the early 1980s reports from fox-hunting farmers suggested that they were more inclined than others to retain hedgerows, but he goes on to say that hunting is not the only plausible motive for fostering hedgerows. In fact, he sees it as being destined to occupy a descending rank in the hierarchy of factors and argument currently fostering conservation.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the comments of none other than Dr. David Bellamy? He has said:

> "While we have hunting, shooting and fishing interests in this country, we will have better landscape management. Without these interests, Britain would become a prairie landscape."

Does the hon. Gentleman accept those comments?

Dr. Gibson: David Bellamy has not done the work that MacDonald has done, but that is not to say that he might not prove to be right in the long term. As I admitted earlier, scientists tend to argue, but I think that at present most people would go along with MacDonald's assessment.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Scientists may indeed argue, but there can be no argument with farmers in my constituency who have told me that they are putting hedges in and preserving them because they enjoy the rural sports, specifically hunting, that those hedges enhance. Scientists may argue, but I can promise that in Leicestershire those hedges are there because people want to jump them—and the same applies to coverts.

Dr. Gibson: I would have said exactly the opposite, and I would have guessed that the hon. Gentleman would too. There is clearly argument among farmers. That is why I think that conservation issues will be based on factors other than hunting.

MacDonald made clear points about conservation issues. Issues of cruelty and the attendant moral questions are difficult to measure, but are of concern to many people. Bateson has attempted to quantify them. Balancing pain against benefits has now become a major issue and degrees of suffering may become quantifiable in different animals as scientific research and methodology develop.

At the end of the scientific analyses, it can be said that we are now in a position to talk about pain threshold measurements and stress levels in animals. From population studies, we can assess the effect of hunting, number distribution and the structure of the population. The debate has now moved to issues of morality and recreation and away from the classic issues of tradition and employment.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): Has Professor Bateson done any work comparing the cruelty involved when a fox dies a natural death—often from starvation or disease—with the pain that it might suffer from a hunt?

Dr. Gibson: He has not done any work on that, but he has asked how such effects should be measured. Foxes do die naturally and it might be interesting to make the comparison. No one is saying that all the research that could be done has been done.

Because of the scientific movements and discoveries that have been made, many aspects of hunting could disappear. The sport might even be conducted without the involvement of a live animal. There is a thought. Other viable substitutes have been suggested. All that it would take is zeal and ingenuity in the consideration of sporting aspects. As has been said elsewhere, as we head towards the millennium, is it not time to think the unthinkable?

I have attempted to expose and measure factors that inform and help the making of a judgment about hunting. As different people put different values on each relevant factor, and as the arguments of population control and farmland conservation seem to be, or will become, independent of hunting, at least in the fox hunting debate, the argument returns to the moral propriety of recreation when suffering is involved against tradition and employment.

The role of good science should not be underestimated and we have highlighted some areas that might be taken up. With it, we can reconsider the traditional arguments to justify sport hunting, but I want to conclude on a positive note: the scientific evidence points us absolutely in the direction of reducing the chasing of animals for sport and of supporting the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester to end hunting with hounds, which is to be discussed in November.

11.19 am

Mr. Christopher Fraser (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate because of the importance of hunting in my constituency. It is important for two reasons: environmental conservation and employment. This debate is about not sport, but the rural economy. Many of the people who support a ban on hunting, particularly Labour Members, live, work and represent urban constituencies and do not understand countryside issues. Urban attitudes often conflict with rural traditions. I invite all hon. Members who represent urban seats to come to the countryside to see what is being done by way of rural conservation and how people earn their living.

What would be the consequence of a ban on hunting being approved by the House? A survey carried out by the Campaign for Hunting in 1996 reported the vital role that hunts play in the British countryside by maintaining walls, hedges and woodlands. For example, hunts are responsible for the management of more than 15,000 acres of woodland for wildlife. Recently, the *New Scientist* concluded that

> "fox hunting has helped shape the British landscape. Areas where it is common often have more hedgerows and thickets which benefit other wildlife beside the fox. These would disappear if hunting were banned."

In June, the National Farmers Union council issued a statement noting that it would

> "oppose any change in the law which would result in any reduction in the range of methods currently available to control agricultural pests effectively. This would include the use of dogs to control foxes."

Going back as far as 1993, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food noted that

> "foxes can cause serious problems for individual farmers, and the Ministry therefore considers that foxes do need to be controlled to minimise lamb losses. Where control is necessary, farmers should be free to carry this out using effective and humane methods, and it is useful to be able to employ a range of techniques."

It is not an issue simply of fox hunting. That is the hook to hang the issue of the countryside on. There may be a case to ensure that hunts conform to modern welfare

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standards and for the establishment of a supervisory body, but if we consider the economic facts, any change in field sports does not stack up.

There are 385 registered packs of hounds, 228,000 participants, hunting or following, and 15,300 people are employed by hunts or in related trades. The total associated expenditure for the pastime is £176 million a year; 400,000 farm animal carcases are disposed of by hunt kennel staff to feed hounds, either at no cost or at a much reduced rate; and 5,700 hectares of woodland are managed by hunts.

If there were changes in field sports and, in particular, if hunting were banned, we could expect nearly 9,000 people to lose their jobs. A total of £120 million of turnover in associated trades would disappear and 400,000 farm animal carcases would have to be disposed of at farmers' or taxpayers' expense. The 5,700 hectares of woodland would have to be managed differently or from another purse. In such a rural economy, no changes are viable.

If I could be persuaded that any future legislation to ban hunting would not cost jobs in my constituency and that we could protect and conserve the countryside better, I would examine it carefully. Nationally, 15,000 people are directly employed in hunts and in related trades. If field sports were banned, riding and livery stables, saddlers and farriers would have little work in winter.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that only 9 per cent. of horses are used in hunting? My wife has had a horse for about 25 years and I have yet to meet a poor farrier.

Mr. Fraser: I will come on to the percentage and who hunts later. I hear the point.

Feed merchants, outfitters and vets would also be badly affected.

Where would it end? The issue of country sports comes down to protecting jobs and rural communities, who rely on those pastimes for their income. My concern must be for people who live and work in my constituency. I do not hunt, but I know and represent many people who do. Hunting is not an elitist sport. People involved with country sports come from all walks of life.

In Dorset, many local stables and livery stables depend on hunting, as do saddlers, horse feed suppliers and horsebox engineers, particularly in the winter months. Many of them were among the 500 people from the South Dorset hunt area who went to the Hyde park countryside rally, which was attended by 120,000 people—the biggest demonstration in London for generations. They went because they felt that their livelihoods were at risk and to show their support for country sports.

Three hunts—the South Dorset Foxhounds, the Purbeck Beagles and the Ytene Mink Hounds—hunt in my constituency. Two of their masters live in my constituency. On Monday, the South Dorset hunt was on Rempstone heath, near Corfe castle, and supporters included pensioners and children.

None of those hunts could operate without the permission of local farmers. Indeed, most of the subscribers to the South Dorset hunt are farmers, their wives and children. They look to the hunt to control and disperse foxes. Any future legislation to ban field sport would criminalise those decent, law-abiding people. In years to come, would that prove to be the thin end of the wedge? Will Bills be introduced that criminalise fishermen and people who shoot?

It is also an issue of civil liberties. A ban on hunting would be an infringement of people's freedom to choose how they live their lives. In a civilised society, tolerance is shown to minorities. We accept that we must listen to and respect views that we do not necessarily personally agree with. People live and work in the countryside and they are now a minority. Parliament has a responsibility to protect the rights of such minorities.

I do not want conflict between the town and the country or even a divided nation, but people who favour a ban on hunting probably do not appreciate that it would not save a single life of a quarry species. Farmers would use other methods to control foxes. They would shoot, snare or trap them. Hunting is, however, the only selective method of controlling pest species. It promotes a healthy population by removing old, sick and injured animals.

Other types of hunting, particularly drag hunting, are not a suitable alternative. The Masters of Draghounds Association has endorsed that view. Drag hunting provides no service to farmers in terms of managing the fox population and enhancing wildlife habitats, hedges and walls. It would not safeguard jobs.

The impact of sport hunting and the proposed legislation on banning hunting, if passed, would have a profound effect on countryside conservation and, above all, on employment in the countryside. We must consider carefully any proposed legislation that comes before the House. If it threatens employment and people's livelihoods, it must be resisted.

People who seek a ban on hunting do the countryside a great disservice. They seek to hang the future and stability of rural life on one issue: hunting. They must not prevail.

11.28 am

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) for his measured speech, which relied on science rather than prejudice. That is a welcome change from some of the arguments that we have heard in the hunting debate. I say to the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser) that it is a grave mistake to assume that Labour Members are ignorant urbanites. I am pleased to say that many Labour Members represent rural communities—one could hardly describe Forest of Dean as urban.

Mr. Fraser: I did not say that. I said that those who live and work in and represent urban constituencies should come to the countryside to see how it is worked and managed and how people there earn their livelihoods. What I said does not detract from the fact that some people are ignorant of that.

Mr. Salter: Likewise, it does not detract from the fact that people will trot out any argument to justify their prejudice. I repeat that it would be a grave mistake to assume that Labour Members are ignorant urbanites who have no understanding of how the countryside works; my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ) does not exactly represent an urban constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) and I are keen anglers; we have spent many years fishing in the countryside and understand country sports. The argument is trotted out that this is the thin end of the wedge, but how is it that recent polls by the *Angler's Mail* and the *Angling Times* show that coarse fishermen are opposed to hunting with hounds in the same proportion as the general public? The argument about fishermen is facetious and has no factual basis.

Mr. Robathan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salter: Opposition Members seem to be getting aerated.

Mr. Robathan: I do not hunt but I occasionally fish. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I am not a keen fisherman. In an interesting speech, the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) spoke about the science of the matter and finally dealt with its morality. Is it moral because you enjoy catching creatures with a hook in their mouths? That question must go hand in hand with whether it is moral to chase creatures. Perhaps you could explain that dichotomy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman uses the word you. Could he please use the correct terminology?

Mr. Robathan: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Salter: The debate is about the sport of hunting: it is not about fishing. Scientific data draw a clear distinction between the ability of fish and other cold-blooded creatures to feel pain and the reactions and the mechanisms that trigger pain and stress in warm-blooded mammals such as deer and foxes. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North nods assent; that gives me some comfort.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole spoke about the "glorious" demonstration. It is amusing to find Conservatives placing such reliance on a mass demonstration. Many Labour Members demonstrated in support of the miners. Did that stop the previous Administration destroying mining communities? It is interesting to note that a measure seems to be immoral if it affects a small number of jobs in a rural environment. Were not some of the previous Government's policies immoral, given the damage that they caused to employment in mining communities and elsewhere?

Mr. Gray: The point about the rally on 10 May is that it was by far the largest popular rally of any kind in the history of rallies. It was two or three times the size of the miners' rally and larger than the poll tax rally. It was the largest popular rally on any subject ever known in this country. That is why it was a significant expression of public opinion.

Mr. Salter: Perhaps my hon. Friend has not been on as many demonstrations as many of us on Labour Benches. I suggest that he did not participate in demonstrations against the poll tax or, if I dare mention it in the new Labour climate, some of the well-attended demonstrations in support of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. He is factually inaccurate. I welcome him to a future demonstration.

Mr. Fraser: It is kind of the hon. Gentleman to call us his hon. Friends. We have noted that with great gratitude. The Hyde park rally was attended by people from across the political spectrum and a Labour Baroness was a keynote speaker at the event. It was not partisan but an all-party matter. The hon. Gentleman should look at the facts.

Mr. Salter: I shall refer to Conservative Members who opposed the poll tax as hon. Friends—and can pray in aid many examples in that respect.

I shall return to the subject of the debate. I made hunting an issue in my election campaign. My constituency contains urban and rural areas with outlying villages. As a fisherman in Berkshire, I witnessed at first hand the brutality and depravity of a fox hunt kill. I have seen hunts dig out a fox that had been run to ground and throw it to a pack of hounds. I am now assured that such things do not happen, but I do not believe it.

I had the privilege of launching the campaign of my hon. Friend the Minister for Worcester in Reading last month and noted the interesting behaviour of the pro-hunting lobby, which engaged in heckling, jeering and jostling. However, that is the stuff of politics and I can handle it. There is an attempt to make the argument country versus town. I took up the challenge issued by the countryside movement, the pro-hunting lobby, to attend a fox hunt. I had seen hunts anyway but I was happy to accept the challenge. I am still waiting for an invitation. People do not want us to see what goes on at the end of a fox hunt. They do not want us to know how barbaric and out of place is fox hunting in modern Britain.

Mr. Gray: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salter: No, I shall not.

A gamekeeper from rural Berkshire signed our petition before 1 May. I said to him, "I am pleased to see a gamekeeper signing the petition. As a rural person whose job depends on the countryside, why do you support the campaign against fox hunting?" He said, "Martin, hunts will often protect areas for foxes to breed so that they have a quarry to hunt." That response drives a coach and horses through the argument that fox hunting has anything to do with conservation or with helping farmers.

Mr. Prior: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salter: No, because I am about to conclude.

The gamekeeper also said, "If you want to put down a fox you can shoot it. We are professionals who rarely miss and we know our job. That is the humane way to control foxes where they are pests." There is no scientific justification for the continuation of the sport of hunting with hounds. There are perfectly viable alternatives such as drag hunting. It is merely a question of satisfying the blood lust of a minority and it is time to call an end to it. I shall support the Bill on 28 November.

11.36 am

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) says that he has never received an invitation to attend a fox hunt to see what happens. I invite him to join me on Saturday 8 November at the hunt of the Royal Artillery fox hounds on Salisbury plain. I shall be delighted to see that he follows the hunt in a Land-Rover to see precisely what goes on. I hope to see him on Saturday week at 11 o'clock at Shrewton Folly for that meet.

There are two sides to the debate. The first is why there should be fox hunting; the second, which is quite a distinct argument, is why we should not ban it. As they are entirely separate issues, I shall deal with them in turn. The first reason for hunting is its utility. Anyone who has owned a chicken run, as I have, and has seen it strewn with the bodies of headless chickens, or who has seen a fox gnawing at a recently born calf or at the cow, or has seen live lambs half eaten by a fox, will know what vermin they are. In that context, foxes are precisely the same as rats and should be dealt with in the same way. We think nothing of hitting a rat on the head with a shovel in the farmyard and we should have the same feeling about dealing similarly with a fox.

I welcome the speech made by the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), who concentrated on the scientific aspects of fox hunting. I shall counter his speech by giving some of my own scientific knowledge. For military reasons, in 1985 the Ministry of Defence banned fox hunting on Salisbury plain because it was felt that it was too dangerous to gallop across the impact area and risk being blown up. In 1988—just three years later—farmers around Salisbury plain unanimously petitioned the Ministry of Defence to reintroduce fox hunting on the impact area because of the effect of the ban on their cows, sheep and chickens. The Ministry heeded that petition and allowed fox hunting to recommence. That is the only scientific evidence that I am aware of as to what happens when fox hunting is banned. It has a significant effect on agriculture.

Fox hunting is the only selective and scientific way in which to cull this particular pest. To suggest that that can be done by shooting simply demonstrates a lack of knowledge about how foxes live. They are nocturnal animals and trying to shoot them by night is not, to say the least, an easy matter. They live in deep undergrowth and down holes, so it is by no means easy to shoot them in the same way as stags are in the north of Scotland.

Mr. Salter: The hon. Gentleman says that foxes come out only at night, but does fox hunting take place at night? I have not noticed headlights galloping across the countryside. When I go fishing, I see a lot of foxes, certainly in the first three hours in the morning. It is possible to hunt foxes using a rifle during the hours of daylight.

Mr. Gray: I am grateful for the opportunity to clarify that point. I look forward to showing the hon. Gentleman what we do on 8 November at Shrewton Folly when he joins me there.

Hounds are used precisely because foxes are to be found down holes and in deep undergrowth. When hounds are driven into deep undergrowth, the foxes are driven out. The hon. Gentleman demonstrates his lack of knowledge of what fox hunting is all about.

I was interested to see this week that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) now accepts that hounds are needed to flush out foxes and that he is talking about changing his private Member's Bill so that selected gangs of hounds will be used in one way or another to flush foxes out of undergrowth. He has changed his perspective on the way in which foxes can be killed.

In my first point—utility—I include mink hounds. Mink is an appalling pest in my constituency. It cannot be killed in any reasonable way apart from by the use of hounds. Here, I might get myself into trouble with the British Field Sports Society by going some way towards agreeing with the hon. Gentleman on the subject of stag hunting. I am not entirely convinced that the most efficient way of culling deer is by using hounds, but I await further scientific evidence on that point. As a Scot from the north of Scotland, where stag are culled perfectly adequately using rifles, I am not convinced that using hounds is the best method of culling stag. However, hounds are essential for culling mink and foxes.

My second point concerns the landscape. There is any amount of evidence that the English landscape is significantly formed by field sports in general. The *New Scientist* says:

> "hedgerow and thickets . . . would disappear if hunting were banned."

That is powerful evidence of the significant influence of fox hunting on the landscape.

My constituency has three packs of fox hounds—the VWH, the Beaufort and the Avon Vale—and we have at least one, perhaps two, beagle packs and a mink pack. The people who follow those packs make a huge contribution to the countryside in north Wiltshire. The place would not be the same without hunting.

The third reason for allowing fox hunting was referred to eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser): the economic benefit to the countryside. In my constituency, a significant number of people are employed as grooms, farriers and manufacturers of hunting kit, saddlery and so on. An enormous amount of money is pumped into north Wiltshire by commodity brokers and others who choose to live in London but hunt in my constituency. One need only visit the village of Sherston in my constituency to discover that hunting is almost certainly the most significant industry in that area.

Nationally, country sports generate 60,000 jobs. I have no reason to doubt that figure. The banning of fox hunting would have a huge impact on the United Kingdom's economy. Fox hunting contributes £3.8 billion to the economy.

Ms Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): I represent a rural constituency some 40 miles from top to bottom and almost as wide and I want to dispel some of the misinformation that has been given about employment. Conservative Members insist that the banning of fox hunting would have an impact on the rural economy, but a letter from a union representing employees in country areas dispels pro-hunters' claim that 160,000 people are directly or indirectly employed in field sports. It says that Department for Education and Employment figures for 1995 indicate that 116,000 people work full and part-time in a range of sporting activities, including football clubs, swimming pools and sports arenas. One can only assume that those figures have been taken into account. The letter goes on to say that members of rural trade unions have come out firmly—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. When I am on my feet, the hon. Lady must resume her seat. The hon. Lady is a new Member, but interventions must be brief and hers was too long.

Mr. Gray: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her useful, if not particularly well-informed, contribution to my speech.

I rest my case on the scientific evidence in the Cobham report. It concludes that country sports generate 60,160 full-time jobs and provide indirect, full-time employment to a further 30,809 people. The use of horses for hunting generates 9,000 jobs to the riding industry, 3,000 grooms' jobs in private establishments and 910 jobs in hunt service. Those figures are well established, but they are easily verifiable in a variety of ways.

In my constituency—I can speak with any degree of knowledge only about my constituency—field sports make a significant contribution. The suggestion that their loss could be made up by a switch to drag hunting simply demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of what fox hunting is all about. Drag hunting is an artificial sport that takes place in certain artificially produced areas and there is no possibility that farmers in my constituency would allow the 500 or 600 riders and followers we often see on a Saturday meet with the Beaufort to cross their land simply for fun. Farmers allow that to happen because they know the real benefit of fox hunting to their farms.

Those arguments go to why we should allow fox hunting but, almost as important, particularly under this new Government of freedom, allowing people to do what they wish—or so they say—is the argument for not banning it. In a sense, those are two different things. The libertarian argument is powerful. The temptation of most Governments is to legislate to allow the majority to do what they wish to do, but the important thing about being a socialist—I suspect that many Labour Members believe themselves still to be socialists—is looking after the minority; those people who are not necessarily represented by the majority. Those who take part in field sports are that minority and, as we saw on 10 July, a significant minority.

Mr. Martlew: In my area of Cumberland, as it was, cock fighting used to be very popular. Unfortunately, we used to have badger baiting as well. The same arguments that the hon. Gentleman is putting forward in favour of fox hunting could have been used in favour of cock fighting and badger baiting. What is the difference?

Mr. Gray: There is a significant difference between the ancient sports of fox hunting and badger baiting. First, many fewer people took part in badger baiting. We can now demonstrate that a significant number of people—I think I am right in saying 600,000—take part in field sports of all kinds. If one cannot prove that such sports are necessarily cruel, wishing to ban them has nothing to do with animal welfare or the economy, but is the result of class hatred and the failure to understand agriculture and the countryside.

I come finally to the way in which the Bill to be introduced on 28 November would undermine the fabric of the English countryside—the fabric of all that is England. Hunting and shooting—and, indeed, fishing—are an integral part of the countryside in areas such as mine. They have been there for 1,000 years. A significant number—a majority—of the people there take part in them or support them. Such sports are a significant part of life in north Wiltshire, and Labour Members who would do away with them are motivated more by one type or another of class hatred and by political correctness than by an understanding of the countryside. As evidence of those motivations, even the hon. Member for Worcester has started to agree that it is perhaps necessary for hounds to flush foxes out of their covers. Moreover, Labour Members have started to agree that foot packs in the north of England may have to traverse hillsides.

The only interesting aspect of those two methods of flushing out foxes is that they are not fun. It is certainly right, however, to acknowledge that fox hunting is fun and that it is a great sport. Many of those who are opposed to fox hunting seem to be saying, "We do not believe that hunting hurts animals and we do not dislike the countryside, but we dislike those whom we perceive as being different from us having fun. If we can do away with their fun and their sport and have a go at those whom we perceive as red-coated, pompous colonels galloping round the countryside, it will somehow appeal to our entirely urban constituents. The people who voted for us do not like that sort of thing, whereas soppy sentimentality about the life of a fox does appeal to them."

Such a political instinct is unworthy and I very much hope that the House will stamp on its head in future debates the Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill.

11.50 am

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on his speech, which tried to get away from many of the traditions of this debate—in which people seem already to have reached their conclusions and then hunt for arguments to support them.

As a new hon. Member for a very rural constituency, I know that it is a gross caricature to describe discussion and debate in my constituency as occurring between town and country. As their new hon. Member, ex-hunters have written to me urging my support for a hunting ban, and farmers and agricultural workers have said that, on balance, they also support a ban. I have also received letters inviting me to attend a hunt—which I did—so that I could hear opposing views from other constituents.

Too often the hunting debate is distorted by caricaturing the extremes of the argument. I should like to make it clear that I do not think that my constituents who participate in and support hunting are a bloodthirsty lot, wishing to inflict cruelty in the countryside and gaining great pleasure in doing so. In the hours that I could spare to attend a hunt in my constituency, no fox was sighted and the event seemed to be much more of a social occasion than one organised to kill an animal. There was considerable enjoyment, however, for those who met socially and enjoyed some exercise.

People participating in that hunt were also not from any one economic class. Although there were members of the landed gentry, if they will excuse me for so labelling them, there were also agricultural workers who were there to have a bit of fun. Therefore, let us please—at least in the House—debate the matter without caricaturing all those on the other side of the argument as evil people.

[Dr. George Turner]

As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North said, we have a responsibility to identify the key facts in trying to determine where the argument should lead. Although I have tried in discussions with my constituents to maintain as neutral a position as possible and to listen to both sides, I have discovered that—probably because of the depth of their emotional commitment, which is based largely on tradition and the life style to which they are accustomed—there are conflicting arguments among not those most keen for abolition but those who support the continuation of hunting. I have had to tell them that they cannot have the argument every way.

At the hunt that I attended, some people made it very clear that it would be a very bad day for foxes if a ban were imposed, because farmers would quickly shoot the lot and there would be no foxes left to hunt. They said that shooting foxes would be much more efficient than the relatively inefficient process of catching foxes with hounds, and that there would soon be no more foxes in my part of Norfolk. Conversely, two or three metres further on, I was approached by other hunt supporters who said that hunts were not only essential but the only reasonable way in which foxes can be properly controlled. They said that shooting would never control foxes. The balance of the argument must therefore rest on the side of those who say, as the scientific evidence seems to indicate, that control of the fox population is a secondary or tertiary consideration to that of the intent of the hunt.

It is very difficult to understand entirely the employment argument, and I suspect that there has been a mite of exaggeration in the case that has been made. The House, however, has a responsibility not simply to assume that there is no validity in an argument. I suspect that a hunting ban will cause some negative effects on employment. Those who are inclined to support the measure must take account of that fact, and I shall certainly attempt to ensure that the House considers it.

It seems a little misplaced, however, to place such emphasis on the effects of a hunting ban on employment when one considers the effects of other factors on countryside employment. In the 28 years that I have been in Norfolk, the number of people employed on a typical large estate has dropped by almost a factor of 10, and that has been the real change in countryside employment. There were once 28 or more employed on large estates, but now, because of modern farming techniques, only three or four are employed on such estates. I am much more anxious for the House and the Government to address employment issues in the rural economy by ensuring, for example, that there is a decent road structure for commerce.

Although I suspect that there will be some negative effects of a hunting ban, they are not sufficiently large to influence our judgment on the main issue, which we will eventually be debating. There should be more neutral analysis of the figures to determine the likely effects of a ban on the rural economy.

It is very difficult to understand the depth of feeling against drag hunting—although I have noted and respect the conclusion of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which has urged me to support a hunting ban. I have expressed those objections to hunting supporters in my constituency, but I was unconvinced by their response. Drag hunts have many of the social benefits that hunting supporters claim for countryside sports such as fox hunting.

Mr. Prior: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that snaring, shooting and trapping foxes is less cruel than hunting?

Dr. Turner: The honest answer is that I am not completely certain. I do not have sufficient scientific evidence. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North, having been trained as a scientist, I am keen to have some facts in front of me before jumping to conclusions. I believe that, as on many occasions, we shall have to make up our minds with only part of the evidence before us.

On drag hunting, if it provides the sport and the exercise and if the agricultural community treasures the nature of the countryside in the way that it says, why not do it? That is the key question that will influence my vote on hunting. I hope that we shall be able to conduct this debate while recognising that the arguments are often shades of grey and, as a scientist and engineer, I am used to that. We cannot paint everything in stark black and white. Life is never so simple. Nature is cruel and, often, so is man. We have a responsibility in the House to debate this issue and to reach the best possible conclusion on the evidence before us. In the spirit of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North, I hope that we shall try to base our conclusions on the facts.

12.2 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I wish to declare a lack of interest as I do not hunt. I have been beagling a few times and I have attended meets, but I do not hunt and hardly ever ride—I can just about stay on a horse. Therefore, I am not arguing from a personal viewpoint.

The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) made an interesting speech and his scientific analysis was interesting. However, when it came down to it, he said that we have to determine the moral issue of whether it is right to hunt foxes. I believe that he was wrong to say that reports have said that there are insignificant losses of domestic livestock to foxes. The number may be insignificant in the huge flock of hens that we have in this country, many of which live in unpleasant conditions inside buildings, but I am keen to encourage free-range hens and, of course, it is such hens that are nobbled by foxes. If a farmer has 100 hens in a free-range pen and a fox takes 20 of them, that is significant to that individual. I do not blame the fox. We should not make a moral judgment on a fox's determination to kill hens because that is its nature. However, it is at variance with what we would want if we were farmers.

Foxes need to be controlled and almost everybody who has taken part in the debate has agreed with that. We have to determine how to do that. The hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) who, sadly, is no longer in the Chamber, talked about shooting. I have probably fired as many rounds of rifle ammunition as anybody in the House during my 15 years in the Army and some of those were fired at deer and other animals. Regrettably, it is not easy and one is bound to wound foxes if one tries to shoot them. The only time I saw a fox shot by a farmer was when he had snared it beforehand. It may have been in a gin trap as I was about 10 at the time. He left the fox overnight and then went back to shoot it. That is not very pleasant. Anybody trying to shoot foxes on the loose is bound to wound some. That is every bit as cruel as hunting with hounds.

The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) mentioned drag hunting. I have never been on a drag hunt but I am told that it is fast and furious and even more dangerous than hunting. I believe that many people who hunt must be a little bit strange because I know too many of them who have broken their necks, backs or collar bones while hunting. My point is that if they wish to hunt and take part in something that contributes—only contributes—to pest control, it is strange that so many hon. Members should try to determine their moral judgment and stop them doing so, whether it be for scientific or for other reasons.

We should address many things if we are looking at animal rights and welfare. What about halal butchery? I have never seen it, but I believe that it is pretty unpleasant. We do not hear much about that because it might be considered politically incorrect to mention it. Anybody who has been to an abattoir, and I have, will know how unpleasant that is. I am not a vegetarian, but I believe that animals should be killed as cleanly and humanely as possible, causing the least possible fear.

This is an issue of morality and, as the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk said, there are arguments on both sides. However, I do not believe that hon. Members should wish to dictate to those who want to take part in a perfectly harmless occupation which plays a part in pest control. We should not say that they cannot do that. I am astonished at the number of people who say, "You will not do this because we do not wish to do it." I do not wish to hunt, but I defend the right of those who do. The House is going down the wrong road if it is about to ban fox hunting.

12.6 pm

Ms Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): I should like to return to a point that I spent too long mentioning in an earlier intervention. I am one of the sponsors of the private Member's Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) and, as I have said, I am not an urban Member as I represent a large rural constituency. It is essential that any debate of this nature must be carried out objectively. In that sense, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), who has endeavoured to achieve that.

It is unfortunate that it is the pro-hunting lobby on the Conservative Benches who seem to be raising the issue of emotion and refusing to debate objectively. That has been shown by the fact that this morning we have heard about the conservation of hedgerows, pest control and the need to maintain foxes and to conserve the countryside as well as the need to get rid of foxes because they are a pest to farmers. Conservative Members need to make up their minds about their arguments.

This is not an emotional issue. I am not emotional about a fox because it is a little red animal with a bushy tail that looks pretty. If it is a pest, the onus is on us to look for humane ways of controlling it. That is the important issue and it was emphasised by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North. The association representing rural workers has made it clear that it is rural workers who have determined the policy of opposition to hunting with hounds. That is a vital point.

I have met many people in my constituency who took part in the countryside rally. It was not a rally about hunting. It demonstrated the despair felt by people who live in rural communities after the former Government's policies over the past two decades. There was a misconception among many people at that rally that a Labour Government would threaten shooting and fishing. That is untrue.

Mr. Fraser: Will the hon. Lady confirm that the Labour party is hanging the entire issue of the countryside on fox hunting? That appears to be the case from the contribution made by the hon. Lady and other Labour Members.

Ms Lawrence: I reiterate the fact that the Labour party now represents 170 rural constituencies, which is more than the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives put together. The Labour party is the party of the countryside.

I want to talk about the rural economy. There is dissatisfaction among people who live in the countryside about the previous Government's policies. I can give an example from my constituency. In 1984, the gross domestic product of my constituency was 84 per cent. of the United Kingdom national average. In 1994, after 10 years under the Conservative Government, it had fallen to 71 per cent. of that average. That reflects the massive concerns that are felt in rural areas. The Labour Government's environmental and economic policies will improve matters, but not by seeking to defend the indefensible as Conservative Members have tried to do today.

12.9 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I congratulate the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on securing the debate and on the measured way in which he approached such a controversial issue. It is somewhat ironic that on the first occasion when I am required to make a speech from the Dispatch Box—I never had the opportunity to make one from the Government Bench, but one lives in hope and ambition—I find that we are addressing the emotive issue of fox hunting.

It is especially ironic because on the first occasion when I took part in a live broadcast during the 1987 general election, I participated in a Tyne Tees Television question time that was broadcast live in Yorkshire and a Conservative representative asked a question about hunting. I have had to address the issue on many occasions and I am the first to accept that it will not go away.

As the hon. Member for Norwich, North made clear, the question that we have been asked to address today does not relate to the merits or otherwise of the Bill that has been tabled by the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster), which we will doubtless scrutinise at considerable length in due course, but whether the world of science can inform our debate. That was the hon. Gentleman's key point.

I represent a huge rural constituency, and when I was a Government Back Bencher I always made my views about hunting absolutely clear. There are now seven hunts in Ryedale; there used to be nine, but two have moved to the Vale of York. There is no question but that hunting has a role to play within the community of Ryedale, where

[Mr. John Greenway]

it is well supported; equally, however, many people take a contrary view. I do not hunt and I have no wish to do so, and nor do I shoot, but we must consider extremely carefully whether we legislate to take away the individual's right to choose to do so. I have always defended that right and I do not believe that there are any grounds thus far to make me change that opinion.

The hon. Member for Norwich, North made a strong case for scientific research to be taken into account when deciding whether or not hunting with dogs should be permitted, and, perhaps more importantly, the extent to which it might be better regulated. My hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who is also on the Opposition Front Bench, and I both thought, however, that although the hon. Gentleman made a strong case for the role of research, it did not follow that its conclusions suggested that one could make a decision on whether hunting should be banned or more widely restricted. I thought that the hon. Gentleman made a compelling case for the value of more wide-ranging research to be carried out in the future.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the research conducted by MacDonald and Bateson, which I understand was narrowly focused. We need research to be undertaken to assess the potential for pain and cruelty to be inflicted. It should also consider the alternatives to fox hunting to which one or two hon. Members have referred, for example, snaring, shooting and gassing. The results of those practices are indiscriminate and have significant potential to cause pain and suffering.

I suspect that most, if not all, hon. Members have received a brief from the Country Landowners Association. It is interesting that it concludes by calling for more research to be carried out. It suggests that public confidence in the proper regulation of hunting would be enhanced if such research was initiated and co-ordinated by an independent authority. It might then make recommendations for the better supervision and regulation of hunting and consider complaints of breaches of codes of conduct. I am sure that we will want to discuss such issues on more than one occasion in the future.

Today we have been asked to consider the key proposition of whether research can inform our debate on hunting. I believe that it does, and I believe that the hon. Member for Norwich, North made that clear. I believe, however, that the evidence thus far is inconclusive and is not sufficiently wide ranging to justify the House deciding that there should be a complete ban on hunting with dogs.

12.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on securing the debate. His speech on such an emotive subject was full of serious points based on a review of the available scientific literature and research. Of course, he is extremely well qualified to make such a speech given his expertise, understanding and the amount of reading that he has done on the subject. I also congratulate him on the thoughtful manner in which he conducted hon. Members through some of the evidence. His speech was in the best traditions of the House and I am sure that the House will look forward to further speeches from him on the subject.

I welcome the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) to the Opposition Dispatch Box—as he rightly pointed out—and long may he remain there. In the few minutes available to him, he made it clear that he has a particular view, but he, too, welcomed the tone of my hon. Friend's speech and the way in which the debate has been conducted.

My hon. Friend referred to the important scientific research contained in the MacDonald and Bateson reports. Given that he dealt with them so fairly and fully, and given the time available, I hope that the House will forgive me if I do not repeat their findings. Today's debate, although inflamed at times, has been marked by some useful and interesting contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber.

The hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser) essentially made a constituency speech in which he spoke of the impact that a ban on hunting would have in his area. He rightly described the economic consequences for the rural economy and specifically the support industries, agriculture and the countryside. I thought that his conclusion was rather apocalyptic, but that will be either proven or disproved by events that may take place.

There was a difference of emphasis, if not of opinion, between the hon. Members for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) and for Mid-Dorset and North Poole on the issue of how many jobs may be lost if the legislation proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) is put on the statute book. The hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole suggested that about 9,000 jobs would be lost and the hon. Member for North Wiltshire said that he thought that 60,000 jobs would be lost.

Mr. Gray: Will the Minister give way so that I can explain that?

Mr. Howarth: I want to say a little more, which may have an influence on the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but then I will give way. I believe that he quoted the report produced by Mr. Ralph Cobham. The House should be aware that that report was commissioned by the countryside movement. The group has a particular point of view and those statistics might reflect that.

Mr. Gray: The figures quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser) referred to those jobs that are specifically attached to the sport of fox hunting. The figures I quoted include, for example, farriers, grooms, people who make saddles and look after horses, and so on. That explains the difference between the two figures.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I suspect that, even making allowances for that qualification, the figure of 60,000 jobs is probably on the high side. Nevertheless, whichever way we cut it, if legislative changes occur, there will be an impact on the rural economy. I do not know the scale of that impact—no one does—but if a current activity is stopped, some businesses and jobs will be affected in some way.

We had an interesting discussion about the "thin end of the wedge" argument in respect of angling and shooting. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) confessed to being an angler and, in the spirit of confession being good for the soul, let me confess that, for most of my life since the age of about 10, I too have been an angler. In defence I should say that when asked by a journalist whether, in view of reports on the subject, she thought that her husband's fishing was cruel, my wife responded, "Not in his case, because he rarely catches anything." I suspect that many hon. Members know that feeling well. There is a world of difference between angling and various sorts of hunting. I am not coming down on one side or the other, but it must be acknowledged that there are differences in approach and in the way the sports are perceived. Any comparison is therefore unfair, although there are some points at which they meet and they are part of the same debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West spoke about the scale of various demonstrations, but I am not sure whether that gives a measure of anything these days. That underlines the point my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North made about how we should be influenced not by who shouts the loudest, but by the evidence available—especially that from the scientific world—which we should coolly analyse before drawing our conclusions.

The hon. Member for North Wiltshire brought a great deal of personal experience to the debate, both from his constituency viewpoint and from his own participation. In many respects, it is worth listening to those who have such experience; however, he indulged in a little hyperbole towards the end of his speech. I am sure that that will make good copy in his local newspaper, but it added little to the debate. We have to consider these matters soberly and although the hon. Gentleman raised some points of interest, some of his comments were more appropriate for audiences other than the House.

The hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) made an interesting and brief contribution about the nature of the fox and about people's freedom to engage in various activities. The scale is debatable, but the fact that foxes are by nature predatory and that they prey on some types of farm animal, especially chickens, is not disputed. That there is a pest element to the activities of the fox has to be conceded.

In the time left, I want to refer to recent debate—by which I mean in the past 40 years or so—and to reports that may or may not have been covered today. The last significant parliamentary report was the report of the Committee on Cruelty to Wild Animals, which was presented to Parliament in 1951. Known as the Scott-Henderson report, it looked into the practices and activities that might involve cruelty to wild animals and concluded that hunting with hounds was no more cruel than any other form of pest control.

The National Trust commissioned Professor Savage's working party report, published in 1993, which studied the conservation and management of red deer and which has been mentioned today. That report did not focus on the animal welfare aspects of that form of hunting. In September 1996, the countryside movement commissioned a review of the findings of the Scott-Henderson report headed by Mr. Richard Phelps, a retired Treasury official. He recommended a new independent authority to initiate research into hunting and to regulate and supervise the practice. He argued that the authority should be self-regulatory and appointed on a basis similar to the Press Commission. That brings us the Bateson report, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North, and other more recent research.

I should now say a few words about the Government's position on these issues. The Government's position on the issue of hunting with hounds is clear: we neither support nor oppose hunting with hounds—we take a neutral position. However, in our manifesto we gave a commitment to allow a free vote on whether to ban hunting. It is our intention to deliver that free vote when the opportunity to do so is presented by the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester. That Bill would ban hunting with hounds and it would outlaw the hunting of deer, fox, hare and mink. It is due to be considered for Second Reading on 28 November and if it secures a Second Reading members of the parliamentary Labour party—including Ministers—will have a free vote.

It will be for Parliament to consider the question of a ban on hunting. There are complex issues associated with any such ban, including the effects on the rural economy, pest control and a range of other rural and agricultural concerns, which have all been discussed in today's debate. The scientific evidence contained in the Bateson report will no doubt be one of a number of factors that will inform the debate and help hon. Members to arrive at their own conclusion.

The assessment of the report and the conclusions drawn by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North will be a valuable addition to the debate. Most important, the manner in which he introduced today's debate—cool, dispassionate and analytical, looking at the scientific evidence, bringing it to bear and weighing one argument against another—is a good way for Parliament to proceed on this subject. If we can keep that sort of debate going over the coming months, the public will appreciate the House far better and we will have performed a valuable service in respect of both animal welfare and the wider community.

Heathrow (Regional Services)

12.29 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I am glad to have been fortunate enough to get this debate in the first week after the House's return from the summer recess. Timing is everything in this case, as it so often is in transport issues.

The debate concerns the precipitate decision taken by British Airways, to take effect in just a few weeks' time, to terminate its three flights a day between Inverness airport and Heathrow, and to switch them to smaller-capacity flights with British Regional Airlines out of Gatwick.

I mean no disrespect to the Scottish Minister with responsibility for transport when I say that I am pleased that a United Kingdom Minister is to reply to my debate. There are many highlands and islands Members present in the Chamber. I hope that the hon. Members for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) will be able to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to stress the all-party nature of this campaign. The crucial point is that it is not just an argument about services between Inverness and Heathrow. It is about the future of services between regional airports throughout the United Kingdom and Heathrow—and the slots for those services.

We have been here before. I shall refer again later to what happened earlier this year to services between Plymouth and Heathrow. Now the same may be about to happen to the service to Inverness. The management of British Airways have in the past offered categorical assurances on the future of these services. Now, without consulting the local community, they are announcing their wish to axe the services. I suggest, therefore, that Members representing Belfast, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Aberdeen and Glasgow should be watching anxiously, because of what has happened to Plymouth and what may happen to their services in and out of Heathrow.

We condemn the lack of consultation and BA's blatantly broken promises. We are deeply concerned about the economic impact that the termination of services will have on the economy of the highlands and islands and the north of Scotland. Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Government agency with the remit of promoting the economic well-being and development of the area, has carried out an in-depth survey of the economic importance of the Inverness-Heathrow link. Some of the statistics in it are worth reading into the record. Among the three airlines plying between Inverness and Stansted, Luton or Heathrow, 85 per cent. of business flights are taken on the BA Heathrow service, and 47 per cent. of terminating passengers' destinations is Greater London. There is no doubt that Heathrow is preferred to Gatwick by most of them. Most importantly, 88 per cent. of interlining journeys on the surveyed companies were made through Heathrow, and only 12 per cent. through Gatwick.

We should bear in mind the fact that the highlands of Scotland depend heavily on adding value to products and then shipping them out quickly to other parts of the globe, in particular to other parts of the single European market. Therefore, the loss of the interlining freight facilities at Heathrow would have a considerable impact.

A week or two ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and I had a detailed meeting with the Scottish Salmon Growers Association, one of whose largest member organisations employs a great many people in Inverness and on fish farms in other parts of the highlands and islands. That firm is already having to reconsider its entire export marketing strategy because of the likely loss of this service.

I will not weary the House by reading out the hundreds of pleas issued by local companies to British Airways and the Government. Suffice it to say that the threat is real and widespread. My hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland and the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) can speak with more authority on this matter than anyone else. The Highland Post Office Advisory Committee has written to me to express its deep concern about the change in the capacity of the new aircraft due to serve on the route. What is more, on one of the UK's most important tourist links during the summer months, about 1,000 passenger seats a week will be lost when the new aircraft to be used by British Regional Airlines is introduced. The aircraft will also have 35 per cent. less hold capacity, and in a more awkward shape. That will affect nightly postal services onward from Inverness. The committee also points out that my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland

> "will be able to show you a dossier of complaints about mail being shut out of flights to the North Isles"

since BA passed over the Stornoway slot to British Regional Airlines.

One local business man summed up the whole affair admirably:

> "I have no objection to British Airways' aspiration to remain one of the world's leading and most successful airlines, but I do think it should reconcile its global ambitions with its domestic responsibilities."

That hits the nail on the head.

I know that the Minister has already said that she wants to meet Robert Ayling, chief executive of British Airways, to discuss these matters. I hope today that she will also refer to the position of the European Commission. Because of BA's global ambitions and its proposed merger with American Airlines, it is under great pressure from the Commission to release slots at Heathrow for competition reasons. It would therefore be helpful if DG IV, the air transport directorate, clarified whether airlines own the slots in question or whether those slots are simply allocated to particular routes.

Once before, BA gave up these slots, which were then taken over by Dan Air. Dan Air eventually went bust, although not as a result of losses sustained on the Inverness service. Peter Clegg, the former director of marketing, said that the airline had been making £1 million a year profit on the Inverness-Heathrow service. Its financial difficulties arose from the charter business links elsewhere in Europe. If, as seems likely, the slot in question was designated for that particular route, there are legitimate grounds—given the number of changes of ownership of the route that I have outlined—for the European Commission looking into the competition implications of the proposed change.

What contacts has the Minister had with the European Union about all this? If she has had none, does she propose to have some in the future?

I mentioned earlier the parallel with Plymouth—the south-west lost its direct link with Heathrow. My hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) wrote earlier this year to Commissioner Kinnock to express his concern. The Commissioner sent him a reply pointing out that the British Government have the power to protect regional slots at Heathrow if they so wish. A local newspaper report of 27 March said:

> "Mr. Kinnock added that there are rules governing how slots change hands",

and said that he was investigating. Kinnock went on to say that

> "a letter has been sent to the UK authorities requesting further information on these points."

That campaign was not successful, even though it was clear that the British Government do have the power to intervene in these matters.

The Labour shadow Secretary of State for Transport met local campaigners earlier this year and pledged that a Labour Government would protect flights to regional airports such as Plymouth. I noticed also that his pledge was immediately condemned by Tory strategists as electioneering. Furthermore, he urged the then Government to use their powers to protect west country air slots at Heathrow in preference to the switch to Gatwick. He said:

> "The message I have been given loud and clear is how crucial the Heathrow link is to people and businesses in Cornwall.
>
> It is very evident the Government has been caught off balance by this. Only last week Sir George Young said there were no plans to vary this service. Yet within three days"

announcements had been made. He added:

> "The Government must act now in the public interest and order British Airways to review the whole situation at Heathrow."

D'accord. I could not have put it better myself.

If that was the view that Labour transport spokesmen held in opposition as recently as February and March regarding south-west services, it would be consistent for Labour Transport Ministers to adopt the self-same approach regarding north-west services now that they are in office.

I conclude by urging two things on the Minister: first, that she respond positively to the concern that she is about to hear expressed by Labour Members, not only Opposition Members and, secondly, that she urges Mr. Ayling, when she meets him, not to take any precipitate decisions on the future of the service until the Transport Select Committee is able to examine on a United Kingdom basis the future of regional slots and the access of the regions of the country to Heathrow as a whole.

I hope that, in that spirit, the Minister responds constructively and positively.

12.41 pm

Mr. David Stewart (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): I endorse the comments by the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) and thank him for initiating the debate.

The Government have issued a consultation paper, examining integrated transport policies. The result of British Airways' decision, not only in the highlands and islands but throughout the United Kingdom, is a disintegrated transport policy. We must attack that head-on.

We also have examples from the Republic of Ireland where, I believe, 160 slots were lost after BA pulled out of flights to Heathrow. We have heard about the example from south-west England. Now we have the issue surrounding Inverness. Which regional airport will be next? Should we stand by while slots at Heathrow are sold off to the highest bidder in a global game of Monopoly? I think not. We must take into account the social and economic consequences.

My hon. Friend the Minister will be well aware of the weaknesses of the legislation as it relates to the current situation. The current legislation is covered by article 9 of the European Union 95/93 regulation. Perhaps this gap in the legislation relating to the safeguarding of slots should be picked up in the transport review that we are conducting, and perhaps incorporated in a future transport Act.

The aspects of the change have been well recorded. We are having a move from Heathrow to Gatwick, a reduction in capacity and a franchising out to another company. I am concerned about the loss of capacity—a loss of 50 seats per journey—and the 60 per cent. reduction in freight, which is a severe problem to industries in the highlands and islands.

There has been no consultation in Parliament about the decision. We were told what was happening a day before the decision was taken.

We are all aware of the big picture. This is about British Airways' links with American Airlines; it is about opening up Heathrow to more transatlantic and European flights. Obviously, there is much money to be made.

I have three questions. First, if Gatwick is so attractive, why did 2 million passengers and 10 airlines move from Gatwick after the traffic distribution rules were abandoned in 1991? Secondly, if British Airways has lost £8 million in the past five years—which is a matter for debate—why not send the cheaper British Regional Airlines aircraft into Heathrow? Thirdly, how does one answer the arguments of the business community in the highlands and islands about moving perishable goods when the new aircraft plant will have less cargo capacity?

I have received much correspondence. For example, Highlands Wholefoods in Inverness asked me what it should do about the import of its perishable goods if the change goes ahead.

I welcome the meetings that my hon. Friend the Minister has had with Councillor Peter Peacock, convener of Highland council, and the meeting that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland had with Bob Ayling, chief executive of British Airways.

I want British Airways to continue to be Britain's favourite airline, but let us remember regional airports and fragile rural areas.

12.43 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I must be brief; I thank the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) and the House for enabling me to make a short intervention in this crucial debate.

The arguments have been propounded in the context of business and the tourism and passenger industry. The Minister should also remember, however, that those of us who represent the most northerly areas of the United

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

Kingdom have always advocated that the development of the highlands and islands be based on fair competition, and we are now witnessing unfair competition.

As a result of the removal of the link between Heathrow and Dalcross, it is almost being argued that we should return to a dependency culture. We do not want that because we want genuine competition. All industries and businesses in the highlands and islands base their success on the world-renowned quality of their produce, and all the businesses with which I have been in contact in the past few weeks have said that the ending of the link will affect them and their local communities severely in financial and employment terms.

Hon. Members have mentioned various industries; I shall mention United Distillers, because the whisky industry is very important in my area. In a briefing sent to us today, United Distillers says that it regards it as very important that the Heathrow link is maintained to enable it to sell its quality goods abroad. Small, medium-sized and corporate businesses are, therefore, united.

The Royal Air Force, which is also important in my area, uses the Dalcross link. Many of the families of the young men who come to serve in the forces in my area remain in the south of England, so those men and their families use the link, and they feel strongly that it must be retained. Obviously, the tourism issue is also extremely important.

I believe that the key issues in the debate are who owns the slots, who sells, who buys and what is the best legal opinion on the matter.

I draw the Minister's attention to the letter from Professor Trevor Salmon of the department of politics and international relations in Aberdeen, published in *The Scotsman* on Saturday. He said:

> "the view of Karel Van Miert, the European Commissioner for Competition, appears to be that the airlines do not own slots. If this opinion is correct, the Inverness slot at Heathrow is not the property of BA to dispose of. Would a legal challenge to the action of BA over the reallocation of, and claimed ownership of, slots be worth pursuing?"

Is the Minister prepared to say that she will challenge BA on the legality of the transference of those slots?

12.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) on obtaining the debate and affording the House the opportunity to examine these deeply important issues. I congratulate him on his generosity in allowing my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) and the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) an opportunity to speak. If, by any chance, as a result of his generosity, I do not complete my contribution, I will ensure that all Members receive a full copy of my speech and I will attempt to answer those questions on which I cannot touch today.

The hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West highlighted the importance of regional air services for passengers and freight in developing economic growth and prosperity in some of the more distant areas of the United Kingdom. They play an integral role in assisting and attracting inward investment, in facilitating exports and encouraging tourism, by their linkage with the rest of the world.

The current strong growth in regional airports and services is, therefore, encouraging. Regional airports have increased their share of air traffic from 29 to 35 per cent. in the past 20 years, and their share of total international traffic has grown even more strongly, from 17 to 27 per cent., creating a climate of confidence in the regional market for air services, which has been expressed in recent major developments in Edinburgh, Newcastle, Manchester and Birmingham, and a completely new airport at Sheffield, which opened last month.

The growth in the range of services from regional airports is also encouraging. New services to London should be good for regional economies if competition on those routes keeps operators on their toes, drives costs down and pushes up standards of service. As competition has opened up, British Airways has become only one of a number of operators on many routes.

There has also been a welcome increase in direct international services from regional airports. Direct services provide a better service to the regions, whether for business, leisure or inbound tourism and help to support regional economic development. Although the picture is generally positive, however, we are going through a period of rapid change and development. Inevitably, some of those changes cause concern. When the subject is as important as economic development in the regions, it is right to address those concerns.

The transfer of the Inverness service to a franchise operator is in addition to a number of such operations from regional airports into Gatwick and Stansted. From the point of view of the customer, such services are visually indistinguishable from BA services, using the same livery and uniforms and continuing the ease of through-booking for transfer passengers. However, BA itself admits that the switch to franchise operations on the Scottish islands route has not gone smoothly—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am grateful for that support. There are continuing serious concerns.

The main focus of concern in the debate has been the transfer to Gatwick. I must emphasise that the scope for Government action to preserve regional air services into Heathrow is extremely limited. The hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West referred to slots and the European dimension. The allocation of slots at European airports is governed by an EC regulation 95/93. Its key provision is for allocation to be carried out by a slot co-ordinator acting independently of the airports and airlines, and of the member state. Under the regulation, Governments cannot, as a rule, intervene in the slot allocation process and must not attempt to influence the decisions of the slot co-ordinators.

Member states are granted a limited power to protect domestic services from busy airports to more peripheral regions. That would be done by ring-fencing the slot currently used at the busy airport for a specified regional service so that it can be used only for that route in the future. The extent of the Government's ability to ring-fence in that way is narrowly defined by the regulation and is possible only where there is only one service to any London airport and only one operator on the route.

I need not labour the point; I need say only that three operators on the Inverness route fly to three different London airports. British Airways argues strongly that a switch to Gatwick has significant advantages for most passengers. Many onward international connections can be made with no change of terminal. There is a wider range of destinations in north America than at Heathrow. For those travelling into London, Gatwick has faster connections to central London—both the City and the west end—and direct rail connections with much of the south-east.

The hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West also referred to the transfer of the Plymouth-Newquay service from Heathrow to Gatwick in March of this year. I understand that both passenger numbers and the proportion of interline passengers have shown strong growth in the first months of that new service. We have had correspondence with the European Commission on the south-west slot issue and answered its questions, and we understand that those answers are to the European Commission's satisfaction.

Serious concerns about Gatwick's suitability to serve the needs of Inverness and the highlands have been raised by local authorities, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. As we have already heard, the Secretary of State for Scotland recently met Robert Ayling, chief executive of British Airways, and urged him to reconsider the decision to switch the Inverness service to Gatwick. I share my right hon. Friend's disappointment about the lack of consultation with local interests and, following my meeting with the Regional Airlinks to Heathrow group, I shall write to Mr. Ayling to make that point as strongly as I can.

As has been suggested, the Transport Select Committee may wish to comment—as is its right—on recent changes in regional air services. Let me reassure the House, however, that the contribution of regional airports and aviation, including regional air services, to regeneration and competitiveness will be an important theme within the treatment of aviation in next year's White Paper. We are actively working on that aspect, with regional seminars in the east midlands and the north-east already behind us, and a national seminar on aviation and integrated transport to be held in London on 5 November.

The Government are already providing active support where it matters for aviation in the United Kingdom regions. We recognise that, in certain circumstances, some socially desirable air services may not be commercially viable, which is why the Scottish Office pays £350,000 a year to support routes to Tiree, Barra and Campbeltown on which public service obligations have been imposed because we consider them essential for the economic and social welfare of the communities that they serve.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is also responsible for Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd., supporting it to the tune of £6.8 million in the current financial year in recognition of the essential role that its 10 airports play in the northern Scottish economy. Furthermore, my Department demonstrates its commitment to the development of the United Kingdom's regional airports through strong advocacy of liberalisation in international air service agreements. Airlines are already free to run services from any UK airport to elsewhere in Europe, which has been one of the main factors behind the resurgence of regional airports in recent years.

I strongly believe that the way forward now is through partnership and co-operation. I urge British Airways to discuss with local authorities the implications of its proposals. It is important that all those involved work together, not to attempt to put a brake on change but to work within a changing world to develop regional air services that best meet the needs of the regions and the United Kingdom as a whole.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

12.56 pm

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): I am grateful to be able to bring before Parliament a major wrong that has been done to more than 21,000 victims of long-term industrial injury and disease, whose top-up pensions under the reduced earnings allowance have been cut by up to £30 a week. That represents 75 per cent. of their benefits. The cut is wrong also because it was made without consultation and because those concerned were promised that benefit, not just for a few years, but for life.

I return to this issue today because of an answer by the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), to a question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd). He said:

> "Those affected by the transfer of over-pension-age recipients of reduced earnings allowance to the retirement allowance 16 months ago were harshly treated by the previous Government. Many people lost up to £30 a week in benefit with little advice or no advance warning, and without the transitional protection which we proposed at the time.
>
> Regretfully, however, we have concluded that we cannot remedy that injustice without breaking our election manifesto commitment to keep within current spending totals. We have also concluded that retirement allowance is the right benefit for those recipients who are over retirement age."—[*Official Report*, 28 July 1997; Vol. 299, c. 8.]

As my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) correctly said in a short Adjournment debate, that reduction, experienced by some of the poorest pensioners, is equivalent to a reduction in the salary of Members of Parliament of £9,000 a year. Let us imagine the reaction if, at 3.30 this afternoon, the Leader of the House were to announce a reduction of that scale in hon. Members' salaries. I suspect that the House would be full to overflowing, and a few harsh words would be exchanged. I hope that similar sentiments can be expressed today.

On the same day as that Adjournment debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), who is now a Welsh Office Minister and was then a shadow Opposition spokesperson on employment, was quoted in *The Guardian* as saying that the cuts were

> "a pernicious attack on some of the most vulnerable, low income households."

He added:

> "The retrospective manner in which the changes have been applied must surely be open to legal challenge and may well, if necessary, have to go to the European Court of Justice."

The Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women, my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), when she was the shadow Secretary of State for Social Security, told the *South Wales Echo*, after a meeting that I and other hon. Members attended in Blackpool about a year ago, that the reduced earnings allowance represented

> "for the individuals concerned, very large sums of money, but of course it is only a small sum of money out of the public purse. It really is one of those issues in which having a Labour Government can make a difference."

To make that difference would cost the Government only £35 million a year, and that figure would decrease every year, because some of those who would receive the benefit are dying.

The Trades Union Congress reminded us in a report that

> "One element of the industrial injuries scheme abolishing for injuries or ill health occurring after 1st October 1990, was the REA, designed partially to compensate victims of diseases and accidents who left their jobs to take lower paying employment, either because they were no longer able to keep up a heavy physical job, or because their condition would worsen if they stayed in the job which gave them their illness."

The TUC report went on to state that the reduced earnings allowance

> "was particularly useful in encouraging people to leave such jobs, such as people working in noisy occupations whose hearing was deteriorating or asthma sufferers whose condition was likely to get much worse the longer they stayed in contact with the substance which caused their asthma in the first place."

The REA thus helped to compensate for reduced pension rights. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone, who ended his Adjournment debate speech by saying that, with the withdrawal of REA,

> "immense and needless suffering has been caused which I believe cannot be justified."—[*Official Report*, 21 June 1996; Vol. 279, c. 1182.]

Time does not permit me to go into detail about the way in which the Tory Government decision of two years ago affected people over retirement age—that is, 65 for men and 60 for women. It resulted in REA being replaced by retirement allowance of only £9.53 a week.

The new rules governing REA benefits which came into effect on 24 March 1996 mean that the only people who will continue to get REA over pension age will be those who work for more than 10 hours a week, and a small number of people who reached retirement age before 10 April 1989.

The implications of the changes were attacked by Opposition spokespeople in the short debate when Parliament scrutinised the regulations in May 1996. At that time, the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), was the social security spokesperson. He led the attack on the REA regulations and told the Conservative Minister, the former hon. Member for Monmouth, that the Labour party felt

> "strongly that there should have been much wider consultation"

over the changes. He promised that Labour would

> "continue to stress the anxieties felt by particular groups and the losses that they will suffer."

My hon. Friend pointed out that it was a mark of the Conservative Government's

> "discomfort over the considerable public outcry about the changes that the Secretary of State has been forced to write to Members about this debate."

He added that it showed

> "how important the debate is and how the Government's intentions have been received by the public."

My hon. Friend highlighted the implications of the drafting of the REA regulations, which meant:

> "Even when there is an intention to stay in regular employment, with just one day's sickness or unemployment, a person over pension age will lose all his REA entitlement and be forced to transfer to RA."

He stressed the potential sexual discrimination in the regulations, whereby women would lose their benefit at 60 years of age, whereas men would continue to receive the benefit until age 65. He suggested that that was contrary to the sex discrimination rules of the European Union.

My hon. Friend concluded:

> "The detail is clear. The Government"—

the Conservative Government—

> "want to use the statutory instrument further to reduce the benefit for disabled people. The stark detail does not give the full colour and flavour of the anguish and problems that many people who fall foul of the benefit will suffer."—[*Official Report, Fourth Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation,* 8 May 1996; c. 3-7.]

I agree with my hon. Friend's comments at that time. I ask now, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley put it in her response to the Minister's oral answer on 28 July:

> "If it was wrong last year, why is it right this year?"—[*Official Report*, 28 July 1997; Vol. 299, c. 8.]

In December last year the current Secretary of State for Social Security was told in response to a series of written questions that he had tabled on the implications of REA that information on the number and results of appeals made to social security tribunals against reductions arising from REA

> "is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 1996; Vol. 287, c. *534*.]

Can the Minister provide such data, in the spirit of openness that we would expect from new Labour?

A year ago, on 14 November, John Monks, the general secretary of the TUC, issued a statement on the trade union response to the REA changes. He said:

> "This mean-minded move by the Government has come as a shock to many pensioners who were injured at work when younger. Their injuries will be with them for the rest of their lives and they thought the Government would stand by them. Ministers have broken faith with some of the most vulnerable pensioners in Britain, and they should make amends."

It gives me no pleasure to say that I agreed with John Monks then and I do so today. If the Government can find, as they rightly did, £300 million from their defence estimate to invest in the national health service, surely they can find £35 million to invest in our pensioners—to give them back the money that was stolen from them.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Withington closed the debate on the REA in Committee, he said that it had been "an interesting debate" and that the Government's response had been "appalling". I trust that no one will be able to express such negative views when the Minister responds today.

1.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): I welcome this debate and the opportunity to explain this Governments' position on the reduced earnings allowance.

I appreciate the concern of my hon Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) and other hon. Members who are present about the hardship caused to many of their constituents by the changes introduced by the previous Government, and it is right and proper that the matter should be raised.

Let me make it clear that no one questions the hardship caused to those who lost income after they had retired, nor the particular impact in the mining and industrial areas represented by my hon Friend. I shall set out the background to the present position and explain the outcome of the Government's review.

The previous Government made changes to the regulations which transfer over-pension-age REA recipients to the lower-rate retirement allowance. Those changes came into force on 24 March 1996 and were introduced with very little warning to the people affected.

Our Government shared the concern that was widely felt about the effect on those people. Following a commitment given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security at the 1996 Labour party conference, I told the House on 2 June that the Government would review the arrangements for the transfer of over-pension-age REA recipients to RA.

We carried out a thorough review of the changes, as we were bound to do, and we considered carefully whether REA could be restored in any way to the people affected.

On 28 July I announced the outcome of the review. We concluded that RA is the appropriate benefit for those recipients who had retired, and that we could not restore REA to those recipients affected by the change, without breaking our manifesto commitments to keep within current spending totals and without creating anomalies. We did recognise that it was essential to improve the way in which we handle those people who currently receive reduced earnings allowance and who have not yet retired.

As my hon. Friend said, REA is an industrial injuries benefit that is paid to employed earners who, because of an industrial accident or disease, cannot return to their regular occupation and suffer a loss of earnings as a result. The previous Government replaced special hardship allowance with REA from October 1986. SHA was basically the same as REA, but was an increase of industrial injuries disablement benefit rather than a stand-alone benefit. The maximum rate of REA payable is currently £40.44 per week.

When first introduced, REA—like SHA before it—continued to be paid after recipients had retired. In April 1987, the previous Government took the first of a number of steps to restrict the amount of REA paid to those recipients who had retired—that is, those over pension age who were no longer working. For those REA recipients who had retired by 6 April 1987, the rate of REA was restricted to the rate in payment at that time. REA was then frozen for those recipients who had retired by 10 April 1988 and again at 9 April 1989. As my hon. Friend said, those recipients are paid at the protected rates for life.

The previous Government then introduced retirement allowance on 10 April 1989 for all other REA recipients upon retirement. An REA recipient who reached pension age on or after 10 April 1989 and retired, transferred from REA to the lower-rate retirement allowance. Retirement allowance is payable at 25 per cent. of the rate of REA last in payment, subject to a maximum—currently £10.11 per week.

The legislation to transfer over-pension-age REA recipients to RA did not work as the previous Government had intended. Many over-pension-age recipients who were no longer working were not transferred to retirement allowance. The legislation provided that REA recipients must first attain pension age and then give up regular employment in order to be transferred to retirement

[Mr. John Denham]

allowance. That meant that someone who retired only a few days before attaining pension age could not be transferred to retirement allowance. Thus there was inequity of treatment. Some 15,000 people were transferred to retirement allowance, but 20,000 others in similar circumstances could not be transferred due to the way in which the legislation was framed.

The effect of the changes made by the previous Government on 24 March 1996 meant that only those over-pension-age REA recipients who were still in regular employment would continue to receive REA. Regular employment is defined in the regulations as at least 10 hours' work a week, averaged over five weeks. This meant that all those receiving REA who were over pension age on 24 March and no longer in regular employment were transferred to the lower-rate RA from 31 March 1996. Other REA recipients would transfer to RA either when they attained pension age or when they gave up regular employment, if that occurred after they attained pension age.

The Benefits Agency reviewed 20,000 REA recipients who were over pension age on 24 March 1996, and 19,600 of those recipients were transferred to retirement allowance. A further 4,000 REA recipients who reached pension age between 25 March 1996 and March 1997 have transferred to retirement allowance.

In the south Wales valleys district—the area that dealt with disablement benefit at that time for a large part of south Wales, including my hon. Friend's constituency and several other constituencies—1,169 REA recipients were identified who were over pension age before March 1997. Those cases were reviewed and only one was not transferred to retirement allowance.

As I acknowledged when I made my announcement on 28 July, many people were treated very badly by the previous Government because they were given little or no warning that their benefit would be reduced by about £30 a week. I fully recognise the concerns that have been expressed again today. Some reduced earnings allowance recipients who had been told that they had been awarded REA for life, or for a long forward period, were transferred to retirement allowance by the changes. Recipients had been given life awards because, as the law stood then, they could not be transferred to retirement allowance.

However, awards of benefit are always made subject to the conditions of entitlement continuing. Any award can be reviewed if the recipient no longer meets the conditions of entitlement set out in the regulations in force at that time. For over-pension-age reduced earnings allowance recipients to continue to receive REA, they must be treated by the regulations as continuing in regular employment. I shall return shortly to the position of those who may have been offered further unconditional assurances about payment of REA.

As my hon. Friend mentioned, there have been hundreds of appeals to social security appeal tribunals against adjudication officers' decisions to transfer the over-pension-age reduced earnings allowance recipients to retirement allowance. Many of those cases were awaiting the outcome of two appeals to the social security commissioners. On 28 May, the commissioners decided the cases and confirmed the adjudication officers' decisions to transfer REA recipients to retirement allowance. We believe that the claimants may appeal that decision in the Court of Appeal. Other cases awaiting social security appeal tribunal hearings should now be heard.

My hon. Friend asked about the information that is available on the treatment and outcome of several appeals. That issue has not been raised with me before now, and I shall look into it. However, I cannot be certain that I can provide the answers that my hon. Friend seeks.

As I have mentioned already, we announced on 2 June that we would review the REA position. We quickly carried out a thorough review of the transfer of over-pension-age REA recipients to retirement allowance, and I announced the outcome to the House on 28 July. Our first conclusion was that retirement allowance is the appropriate benefit for those REA recipients who are over pension age and have retired from regular employment. It is not appropriate to compensate someone for a loss of earnings who would not be working even if he or she was not disabled.

We recognise that many of the 24,000 REA recipients who were transferred to retirement allowance feel that they were treated unjustly. We considered, as part of the review, restoring REA or giving transitional protection to those recipients who had been affected by the changes. Leaving aside for one moment the real problems of public spending—I must return to them later—we should recognise that action would create its own problems.

If REA were restored to all those recipients affected by the changes, the previous differences in treatment between those who had and had not been transferred to retirement allowance would be restored. The 15,000 over-pension-age REA recipients who had already been transferred to retirement allowance before the March 1996 changes were made would continue to be treated unfavourably compared with those in similar situations who were not transferred to retirement allowance until the March 1996 changes were made.

Those changes were made 18 months ago. There would be similar difficulties and unfairness if we now sought to give transitional protection to those people who lost REA. These are real difficulties but, fundamentally, I ask my hon Friend to recognise that he and I were elected on a manifesto that committed this Government to keeping within the current spending totals.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I recognise the difficulty facing my hon. Friend the Minister in putting his case. However, I remind him that there have been spending adjustments in Departments—an extra sum has been found in the Department of Health to try to avert the crisis that may be imminent in the health service this winter. I think that most people recognise the injustice—which was again drawn to our attention by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) this morning—of what happened to people last year. Although I recognise that that action was taken by the previous Government, surely some adjustment can be made in the Department of Social Security to take account of the injustice that has been done to the people whom we represent.

Mr. Denham: I have made it clear that that injustice is not the subject of today's debate. We must take account of the pressures on Government spending and the importance of those commitments in all our decision making. We would all welcome decisions to increase investment in the health service this winter, but not every pressing demand on the Government can be met within the prudent spending limits that we have quite rightly adopted.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend. He continually rests his case on the election manifesto commitment on public expenditure, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) reminded us, the Secretary of State, when shadowing this responsibility, said very clearly to a deputation of hon. Members that this was an issue on which a Labour Government really could make a difference.

Mr. Denham: We have followed through that discussion by keeping our commitment to have a review—the announcement that I made in June. If I may, I would like to make some progress to explain the action that we have taken.

We estimate that to restore REA to all those people affected would cost around £45 million a year gross, about £40 million after allowing for offsets. This could be found only by cutting support for others in need. The overriding need for prudent public spending and to meet our priorities to improve education and health services means that we are not in a position to tackle every hardship and injustice caused by the previous Administration. We have concluded that it would not be possible to restore REA or provide retrospective transitional protection.

However, as I have said, many of the 24,000 REA recipients who transferred to retirement allowance following the March 1996 changes were treated very badly by the previous Government. It was harsh that they received very little warning of the reduction in their income of about £30 a week. That caused many pensioners considerable financial hardship. We are determined that REA recipients who transfer to RA in the future are better prepared than those who transferred under the previous Government. We have arranged for the Benefits Agency to write to all REA recipients to give them sufficient warning that they will suffer a reduction in their benefit when they attain pension age if they are not working. This will enable them to plan for their future.

As my hon Friend said, there may be individuals who have received a notice that an award of REA would continue to a particular date or for life who can show that the Benefits Agency made a mistake in giving them a further unconditional assurance that the award would continue for that period. In such circumstances, the individual may be able to get help under the Department's special payment arrangements, which offer financial redress in cases of maladministration. As the unconditional assurance should not have been given, an exgratia payment can be considered in these cases if the individual can show that he or she has undertaken an on-going financial commitment based upon the unconditional assurance.

This is a most regrettable situation which we inherited from the previous Government, but I hope that my hon. Friends will appreciate why we are not able to restore REA to those unfortunately affected by the changes without adequate warning. I hope that they will recognise also the steps that we have taken to ensure that, in future, REA recipients will be given sufficient warning of the position when they reach pensionable age.

1.22 pm

Sitting suspended.

Fishing Vessel Sapphire (Recovery of Wreckage)

1.30 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Four weeks ago to the day, the Sapphire—Peterhead-registered fishing boat 285—was lost about 12 to 15 miles from its home port. My constituents Adam Stephen, Robert Stephen, Bruce Cameron and Victor Podlesny lost their lives. Our proceedings are being heard by representatives of those men's immediate families and by the only survivor of the tragedy, Victor Robertson. These are people who are united in grief and also united in a campaign to have the bodies of their loved ones returned to their families, if that is humanly possible, to allow a family burial.

The campaign, which is being conducted with the most enormous dignity, is supported by the local mission, by local councillors, by the wider community of Peterhead and by every fishing community the length and breadth of the country, there being a special bond that unites people facing tragedy.

I want to do three things in this brief debate. First, I want to set out an argument as to how we should deal with people in the circumstances that I have outlined, including the right attitude to adopt, and the modern and correct attitude towards family burials instead of services of remembrance.

Secondly, I want specifically to focus on what I regard as a huge anomaly within our system of public administration, which is that no one has any public responsibility for recovering the bodies of men lost at sea. It is extraordinary that there should be no such responsibility, and it is a situation that cannot be allowed to continue.

Thirdly, I want to present to the Minister information that I made available to her yesterday evening on the results of a feasibility study commissioned by the families, which shows beyond any reasonable argument, I think, that it is possible to recover the Sapphire and to have a good chance of recovering the bodies—all or some—of the lost men.

The traditional attitude in fishing communities was towards sea graves, but there has been a substantial change in recent years. The reason above anything else is that we have seen 25 years of new technology in the North sea. We have an oil industry that daily uses techniques and technology to recover many things from the sea bed, from oilfield debris to second world war mines. Millions upon millions of pounds are expended in that process. It is now technically possible to locate, survey and raise fishing vessels that are lost at sea. That was not the position in the past.

Over the past few years—I know this from speaking to inspectors privately in the marine accidents investigation branch—in virtually every instance of a fishing boat being lost, there has been a real and passionate demand from the families involved to have the bodies of the lost men recovered.

Seven years ago, there was a well-publicised campaign, supported by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, including many hon. Members whom I see in their places today, to raise the Antares, a boat which sank in different circumstances but which was the subject of a vociferous campaign by Clyde fishermen over several weeks before the Ministry of Defence agreed to do what I believe it was duty bound to do, and raise the Antares—from deeper water, incidentally, than that in which the Sapphire is lying. The exercise resulted in the bodies of three men being recovered. One body was later recovered in the estuary.

I was speaking recently to Patrick Stewart of the Clyde Fishermen's Association. He was in no doubt that the recovery of the Antares greatly assisted the grieving process, and that the recovery of the men's bodies was of substantial comfort to the families involved. I therefore think that feelings within the fishing community and in the wider community have changed.

The attitudes that have changed in the fishing community, as so clearly demonstrated in recent tragedies, are mirrored in the general attitudes of society. For example, in past conflicts, men lay as they fell. In more recent conflicts, such as the Gulf war and the Falklands, service families have had the option of having the bodies of their lost ones returned for family burials, and rightly so. Our attitudes as a society are changing, and because of improved technology, the change of attitude has been especially rapid within the fishing community.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): As my hon. Friend knows, I have already written to the superintendent of the mission in his constituency expressing the condolences of the fishing communities of Moray on the loss of the Sapphire, which has recalled for many of us the loss of the Premier. My hon. Friend might care to extend the debate slightly further, because there are instances of fishermen being lost at sea without the loss of the boat on which they were sailing. There is a strong case for investigations to be undertaken in all losses of life at sea in such circumstances, and I refer particularly to the loss of my constituent, Neill Wood.

Mr. Salmond: Only too tragically, my hon. Friend and other Members who represent fishing communities will have similar experiences. Many Members—some of whom are in the Chamber today—have written to me and my constituents over the past few weeks expressing their sympathy and condolences.

My hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) brings me to my second point. It is remarkable that no public agency has any formal responsibility for recovering the bodies of men lost at sea. As a society, we spend millions of pounds recovering second world war mines, which are a danger to oil installations. One was recovered quite recently at a cost of several million pounds, and rightly so. But there is no agency with responsibility for recovering the bodies of lost men. The remit of the MAIB is confined purely to determining the cause of the incident.

My constituents and the wider fishing community are acutely concerned to ascertain the cause of the sinking of the Sapphire. There is also concern that the bodies of the lost men should be returned. That concern is not answered formally by any public agency.

The Sapphire sank on 1 October. On 19 October it was located and surveyed by a remotely operated vehicle. It is arguable—it is almost definite—that the boat would not have been found if it had not been for the intervention of one of the widows, Isobel Podlesny. She was able from her knowledge of the fishing community to determine new co-ordinates from where an oil slick had been seen. The surveying vessel proceeded to these co-ordinates, and found the Sapphire just before the contract expired. I mention that because it shows the determination of the families involved, including their relatives, to have their men returned if humanly possible.

The Sapphire was located and surveyed. It is lying in 83 m of water—270 ft, for those who still think in "old money". It is lying on its starboard side and is intact, as if it had been placed on the sea bed. Determining the cause of the accident is the responsibility of the MAIB, and I am sure that it would be greatly assisted by having the physical evidence that would come with the return of the vessel. Even within the narrow bounds of present public responsibility, I submit that the Minister can ask for that to be done.

The Minister should institute a review and give an agency the responsibility—whether the MAIB or another public body—of examining the feasibility of recovering boats lost at sea. No one would argue—certainly not my constituents—that recovery is possible in every case. In many instances, the boat cannot be found. In some, the boat will be so badly damaged as to make its recovery impossible. In others, there will be a huge element of danger, making it impracticable to recover the boat. However, someone should have responsibility—with the onus on recovering the bodies of lost men, if that is possible—to examine feasibility and to come to a considered judgment.

It is totally unsatisfactory that no one had that responsibility. Investigations proceed on a time scale that is designed purely for the official investigation into the cause of an accident. It is now four weeks to the day since the Sapphire sank, and that time scale has been painfully slow for my constituents.

I do not blame the inspectors or the management of the marine accidents investigation branch, who are working to a remit in determining the cause of the accident. But we, as the people who frame legislation, should fill this public responsibility vacuum, ensuring that some agency has such a function and remit, and answers the call of these families in their grief.

I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity at least to consider that wider element, so that no families in future suffer the agony of uncertainty that my constituents and many constituents of other hon. Members have suffered in recent years.

The Minister has written a letter to the relatives in which she sets out the reasons why the boat cannot be recovered. She argues that informal advice from the MAIB shows that a dive to recover the bodies would involve an element of danger to the divers concerned. Quite properly, she considers that such a dive would not be justified and could not be undertaken. All my constituents agree with that.

The families, passionate and determined though they are to recover their lost relatives, would not argue that any human life should be placed in jeopardy in that enterprise. These are fishing families, so they are aware of the dangers of the sea, and would not argue for anyone to be put in that position.

Fortunately, and overtaking the Minister's correspondence, we have available a feasibility study—I faxed a copy to the Minister last night, after she had written the letter to the families—which was published a few minutes ago in its full terms.

This study into the feasibility of lifting the vessel from the sea bed and recovering the bodies of the lost men was conducted on behalf of the relatives by Dronik Consultants, the company employed by the MAIB to survey and locate the vessel. It agrees with the informal advice given to the Minister that a pressurised dive at that depth to a vessel lying on its starboard side would be dangerous and unjustified. It would also be a costly operation: the cost is estimated to be £800,000.

Luckily, there is an alternative. The feasibility study sets out how that alternative can be carried through. The technology of lift barge vessel recovery is available, and would be cheaper and totally safe, because it does not involve the use of divers, but merely a remotely operated vehicle.

Luckily also, by coincidence a vessel with the capability to lift the Sapphire from the sea on to its deck and bring it back to port is at present in Scottish waters: Tak Lift 4 is available from today for the next 21 days, with no schedule of work. A plan to lift the Sapphire could be carried out by that vessel at an approximate cost of £380,000. It would involve no danger, no pressurised diving and no jeopardy of any other human being, and would enable the bodies of these men to be returned to their grieving families.

I hope that the Minister will take careful note of this new information, and agree to consider her position. This information has come to light through the initiative of the Sapphire families. I accept that this is a difficult question, as do the families, but we must have a considered public response.

There is no doubt that recovery of the vessel would assist the process of determining the cause of the accident, and it is possible for the Minister to order its recovery within the terms of her remit and that of the MAIB. The sum of £380,000 is not insignificant, but in relation to the massive expenditure on the North sea, it is a very small sum indeed. Given the impact that it would have on the lives of my constituents and the grieving families, it would be a massive step forward. By forcing us as a society to accept public responsibility through an agency that would examine feasibility in future cases, it would be a step well worth taking.

It is not always in politics that we get a chance to do the right thing. I am hoping that the Minister will take the opportunity to do it today. The right and just thing is to accede to the families' demands to lift the Sapphire, and to give them hope that some or all of these men will be returned to their homes. On this occasion, we should let humanity prevail.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): I am sure that I speak for all hon. Members when I express my deepest sympathy for the families so grievously bereft by this tragedy. I am sure that we all send our commiserations to the surviving skipper of the Sapphire, who continues to suffer the trauma of this terrible accident. I am equally sure that the hon. Member

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) wishes with all his heart that there had been no necessity for him to raise this debate. However, there is a necessity to debate the matter, and it is entirely right that the House should do so.

Mindful of the agony of not knowing for the families so grievously bereaved, I am assured that the staff of the marine accidents investigation branch kept them fully informed of progress during the search for the vessel and the on-going inquiry, and I am grateful to them for that. The families have also been shown the complete video of the underwater survey of the Sapphire. A full photographic survey of the wreck was made, despite difficulties in manoeuvring the remotely operated vehicle around nets and wires floating in the vicinity.

No bodies were seen. That does not imply that they were not there—merely that nothing was visible to the camera. I am told that the families viewed the video with great dignity—surely a harrowing experience for them—and it remains their collective wish for the bodies to be recovered.

Searches for and recovery of bodies can, theoretically, be carried out by divers. The hon. Gentleman referred to a feasibility study, but I regret that I have not seen it in detail, and I am dependent on the advice that has been given to me by officials. Although the feasibility study shows that recovering the Sapphire is technically achievable subject to fair weather, it also shows that it is a difficult operation. The estimate of costs is almost £400,000, but that should not be central to our considerations.

The marine accidents investigation branch has sought expert opinion on the prospects in this case. Although it would be technically possible to deploy divers under saturation conditions, the presence of nets and other obstacles makes that task extremely hazardous. Furthermore, the trauma suffered by divers in undertaking the terrible task of recovering bodies, if they could be located, must be taken into account.

The MAIB's philosophy with regard to diving on wrecks is that divers' lives must not be put at risk unnecessarily, and the operator's decisions on their deployment is paramount. I am extremely reluctant to risk compounding this tragedy by promoting actions that are not justified on grounds of safety, and that could lead to further loss of life.

Mr. Salmond: As soon as we received the feasibility study yesterday evening, I faxed it to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. We have a meeting later this afternoon at which these matters can be further discussed. The feasibility study suggested that divers would be put at unacceptable risk, and it does not recommend such action. It would also be a costly operation. The study suggests that the option of lifting the vessel from the sea bed is very real, and has a far greater chance of success than sending down divers.

We are aware that there is no certainty in this life, and certainly none in dealing with the sea; but the feasibility study by a company employed by the Government to survey the vessel suggests that there is a very good chance of a lifting vessel being successful in the enterprise, and a good chance that such a vessel will be available in the Scottish sector over the next 21 days.

Ms Jackson: I will try to read the feasibility study before I meet the hon. Gentleman and the families. I take his point, but it does not strike me as a point of principle that I could endorse at this stage.

The decision on whether to raise a wreck can sometimes be finely balanced. It may be appropriate to raise or remove a wreck that is a hazard to navigation, to prevent or minimise pollution from cargoes, or to determine the cause or causes of loss. The Sapphire is lying on her starboard side in a depression on the sea bed at a depth of about 90 m; at that depth, the wreck does not pose a hazard to navigation. As for the need to prevent or minimise pollution from cargoes, here again there is no argument to support raising the wreck.

The decision on whether the Sapphire should be raised to determine the cause of her sinking lies with the chief inspector of the MAIB. If the chief inspector finds that he cannot establish the cause of a vessel's loss by examination of the available evidence, he will consider raising a wreck. In the case of the Sapphire, however, it now seems likely that sufficient material is available to allow the inspectors to make progress with their investigation without raising the wreck.

Since its formation in 1989, the MAIB has raised only one wreck, the much smaller Gorah Lass, off the north coast of Cornwall earlier this year. On that occasion, unlike the occasion involving the Sapphire, there were not enough leads for the investigation to proceed without recovery. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Antares—to which he referred—was raised by the Royal Navy.

The feasibility of raising a wreck will vary according to the size of the vessel, the depth of the water, the time taken to locate the vessel and many other factors. While I acknowledge that the recovery of a vessel may be of assistance in an investigation, experience shows that the process of raising a wreck may sometimes destroy crucial evidence. That, I believe, is another factor when we are considering the possibility of raising such a wreck for the recovery of bodies. Equal damage could be caused. Even if a wreck is recovered intact, there can be no guarantee that the evidence will be of value to an MAIB investigation.

Recovery of bodies from wrecks is a difficult issue. Even the most expert diving operation has its limitations. There is always the prospect that divers will never be able to search every part of a wreck. Even if some bodies are discovered and subsequently recovered, there remains the prospect that others may never be found.

There are also strong arguments for protecting, as graves, sunken wrecks associated with loss of life. The Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 provides the Secretary of State with powers to protect war graves; unauthorised interference with wrecks designated under those powers is a criminal offence. The Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Act 1997 provides power to implement international agreements relating to the protection of wrecks outside the United Kingdom's territorial sea.

The Government will shortly use that power to implement, and become party to, the agreement on the wreck of the Estonia. The agreement designates the wreck site as the final resting place of the victims of the disaster, and requires parties to make interference with the site a criminal offence. The UK is also participating in negotiations with Canada, France and the United States on a multilateral agreement on the wreck of the Titanic.

Let me return to the tragedy of the Sapphire. I am sure that the House wishes to pay tribute to the search and rescue effort that was mobilised when the Aberdeen coastguard was alerted to the sighting of two red flares by the fishing vessel Elegance, a partner vessel to the Sapphire. The search involved two RNLI lifeboats, two RAF rescue helicopters, one RAF Nimrod aircraft and 19 fishing and oil industry support craft.

The search for the four missing crew members was suspended at 2300 hours, and resumed at dawn the next morning. An RAF rescue helicopter from Lossiemouth, along with the RNLI lifeboats from Peterhead and Fraserburgh, carried out a search in the area. The area was thoroughly searched by numerous craft, and the Aberdeen coastguard, in consultation with other authorities, terminated the search at 1100 hours on 2 October.

A search is not called off until all possible areas have been thoroughly searched and there is no likelihood of survivors' being found. That is never an easy decision, and it is made only after the most careful consideration.

In general terms, I must emphasise the Government's concern for the safety of all fishermen. The Marine Safety Agency is responsible for the implementation of the Government's strategy for marine safety—

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Jackson: I would, but, with respect, I have already allowed the hon. Gentleman to intervene once—

Mr. Salmond: There is plenty of time.

The Minister wrote to my constituents expressing her condolences: the letter arrived in Peterhead this morning. She founded her argument, properly and legitimately, on the case that an operation by divers to recover the bodies from the Sapphire would not be justified because of the danger involved.

We have produced a feasibility study carried out by a company with impeccable credentials, which shows that a cheaper and better option with far more chance of success is available to the Minister. Surely she will now give me an undertaking that she will at least consider the study, and, at the meeting that we are to have with the families this afternoon, will undertake to look at it and see if she can return to the subject and consider whether an operation by lift barge would not be possible and well justified in the circumstances.

Ms Jackson: I am perfectly prepared to give the hon. Gentleman and the families involved an assurance that I will look at the feasibility study, but I am not in a position to give an assurance that I will accept its findings. There are serious considerations, regardless of this or any other feasibility study, which must be given due weight. I am prepared to read the study, but I am not prepared to give an assurance that I will change my initial position—which, as the hon. Gentleman said, I made plain in my letter.

The chief inspector of the MAIB concluded that it was necessary to try to locate the sunken vessel, and to inspect it using video cameras mounted on a remote-operated vehicle. That is a normal method of carrying out underwater surveys. A suitable vessel was chartered following the normal process, and a 72-hour contract was placed on 20 October. Unfortunately, the wreck was not located during that period, and the contract was therefore extended by 24 hours to widen the search area.

While the extended search was under way, on the evening before the search was due to be completed, one of the next of kin contacted the MAIB with the position of a previously unreported oil slick, which had been passed to her by the crew of another fishing vessel. That position was found to correlate with a very small target that had already been seen on the sonar trace. A further extension in contract time was necessary to investigate that contact.

The decision to do that was made, and the remotely operated vehicle was launched to investigate. It discovered and positively identified the Sapphire, lying—as I said—on her starboard side in a depression that was uncharacteristic of the sea bed in the region. That is why it had not shown up more extensively in the original search. Throughout that time, the next of kin were regularly updated on how the search was progressing.

In view of the importance of finding out why the Sapphire capsized, and because of the public interest, the status of the investigation will be that of an inspector's inquiry. A report will be submitted to the Deputy Prime Minister within 12 months of the incident. Subject to his approval, it will be published.

The sea can be a cruel and exacting master. Since the loss of the Sapphire, two further lives have been lost in fishing vessel accidents. My own family has paid such harsh dues to the sea, in both peace and war. But, however cruel the sea may be, I believe that it is—by virtue of those who have given their lives to it—not only a peaceful but an honourable, indeed noble, final resting place. I hope that the families who have experienced such grievous loss in this tragic incident will be able to contemplate it as a final resting place for their loved ones.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Parades

1. **Ms Corston:** What steps are being taken to reduce tensions over parades in Northern Ireland. [12405]

9. **Mr. Savidge:** What steps are being taken to reduce tensions over parades in Northern Ireland. [12415]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Marjorie Mowlam): As my hon. Friends will know, the Public Processions etc. (Northern Ireland) Bill received its Second Reading in another place yesterday. The Bill is designed to tackle the difficulties that have surrounded the parades issue in recent years by encouraging local agreement and by giving the Parades Commission the power to make decisions and determinations where appropriate.

Ms Corston: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her fine record of achievement in just six months as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

As the current Parades Commission membership has been open to criticism, or been criticised, by some people on both sides of the community, will my right hon. Friend review its membership?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for that question and for her kind comments. The achievement has been the work of many people over the past six months. In the end, it is the Northern Ireland political parties that will make a difference in Northern Ireland and that will make progress or not. In previous months, they have shown, across the board, much courage in getting us to where we are.

I do not have any intention of changing the make-up of the Parades Commission. I should like to take this opportunity to thank Alistair Graham and his colleagues for the good job that they have done. Up to now, they have been doing their job with one hand tied behind their backs. With the legislation that is in the other place, we are giving the commission the powers that were recommended for it in the North report. That will enable it to carry out its role as North envisaged.

It is now up to both sides to work with the commission to try to reach the most peaceful solution to the parades issue in the next year. In the end, accommodation is the best way forward and accommodation will be reached by people working hand in hand with the commission.

Mr. Savidge: I endorse the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston). What impact will the legislation that my right hon. Friend has introduced have on more contentious parades such as Drumcree?

Marjorie Mowlam: Drumcree, in the end, is part of a broader issue. To deal with the Drumcrees, we will have to try to find mechanisms to build confidence between the two communities and to build greater trust and respect. The Parades Commission has been set up to try to address issues such as Drumcree: the commission will be able to consider individual parades and to determine an outcome, taking into account both the rights of people to march and their responsibilities towards the rights of others to be free from fear and intimidation.

The Bill is not anti-marching, but is an attempt to accommodate the two sides of the community in terms of reaching an accommodation that they can both live with. In the end, if we get to the determinant powers that the Bill will give to the Parades Commission, we shall have failed to reach an accommodation, which is the best way to move forward. The Parades Commission will be ready to do that in the months ahead when the legislation has passed through the House.

Mr. Maginnis: Does the Secretary of State have no second thoughts about her capitulation to the IRA-inspired and orchestrated pressure over the parades issue? Is not the truth the prediction of Dublin journalist and writer Ruth Dudley-Edwards, who suggested that, if the Orange Order sought to accommodate on this issue, pressure would be applied to the Royal British Legion and then to the Girls Brigade? Has Bellaghy not proved Ruth Dudley-Edwards to be correct? Does the Secretary of State intend that further capitulation on the Bellaghy issue will be, in effect, another tranche of the danegeld that she is obliged to pay to keep the IRA at the table of democracy?

Marjorie Mowlam: I obviously disagree with much of what the hon. Gentleman says. There is no hidden agenda; there is just a straightforward attempt to listen to all sides after Drumcree last year. We said after that situation that we were committed to bringing in the Parades Commission and its statutory powers, and we said that we would listen to people. I listened to the hon. Gentleman's party, to Church groups and to parties across the board and tried to respond positively to all of them. In terms of the Bellaghy issue, I was with the Guides the day before yesterday.

We will treat all situations in a fair and open fashion. Part of the object of the Parades Commission is to let people see the open, transparent process that will be followed to reach a determination. It is important for people to remember that the commission is not anti one side or the other; it is trying to assist with an accommodation and to reach a conclusion about parades next year so that people do not have to live through the violence that has occurred previously.

Mr. Mallon: Does the Secretary of State agree that marches and parades that give offence, deny the rights of others and inject sectarian venom into the community should derive no credit or advantage from the fact that they are traditional and have traditionally poisoned relationships within Northern Ireland? Will she ensure that, in the new parades legislation, new Labour thinking on this issue will not be strangled by the old dogma of traditionality?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question and I reiterate that the basis of the Parades Commission is to acknowledge the rights of both communities—the right to march, to free assembly, to protest and to have freedom from fear and intimidation by others. That is the basic principle on which it will be based.

The Parades Commission has a broad set of criteria on which to reach conclusions. They take into account a host of recommendations and are not just limited as they have been in previous years. In that sense, I hope that the full statutory powers that the commission will be given if the legislation is passed through both Houses will provide broader criteria on which to reach a conclusion which, we hope, will be acceptable to more people.

Mr. MacKay: Surely the best way to reduce tensions, both in respect of parades and elsewhere in the Province, would be for the Secretary of State to state categorically today that we have absolutely no political prisoners in this country and that she will never again do the sort of shabby deal that she did with David Irvine of the Progressive Unionists, which would have led to a very evil murderer in Jason Campbell leaving prison in Scotland and going to the Province. *[Interruption.]*

Marjorie Mowlam: I will answer the question in relation to Jason Campbell. I apologise for any upset or hurt that was caused to the Scott family. I am sorry if it caused them any deeper pain than they already felt.

Jason Campbell claimed family ties in Northern Ireland. Like the previous Government, we have followed the policy of transferring prisoners closer to their families. The Conservative Government did that previously and we have continued to do that.

It subsequently became clear that the claims that Jason Campbell had made were false. The decision was then corrected and the transfer was refused. I believe that that was a correct decision. However, in line with the European convention, the Government remain committed to the principle of, where possible, transferring sentenced prisoners to places closer to their families.

Peace Process

2. **Mr. Corbyn:** What recent meetings she has had with political parties to discuss the peace process. [12407]

3. **Mrs. Fyfe:** If she will make a statement on the present state of the peace talks. [12408]

6. **Mr. Tony Clarke:** What progress has been made in multi-party talks on the future of Northern Ireland. [12412]

8. **Mr. Soley:** If she will report on the progress of the negotiations in Northern Ireland. [12414]

Marjorie Mowlam: The talks started on 24 September and by 7 October we had had substantive discussions in the talks on all three strands. Since 7 October, the talks have, for the most part, proceeded in a calm, constructive and businesslike manner. The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy), and I have had multi-party talks in the talks process with all the parties. Alongside that, the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), and I have had meetings with the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and his party in normal bilateral meetings. A couple of weeks ago in Northern Ireland, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also met the parties.

Mr. Corbyn: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her work in getting the talks under way and her preparedness to meet all parties in Northern Ireland as a way of furthering the peace process. Does she agree that it is important to keep the peace process on track and to keep confidence-building measures going? My right hon. Friend has already mentioned the transfer of prisoners, but will she enlighten the House further on whether more prisoners will be transferred, either to Northern Ireland or to the Republic, as is appropriate? Does she recognise that maintaining prisoners in Britain is often as much a punishment on their families as it is on the individuals themselves, and that transfers are an important part of building confidence in the peace process?

Marjorie Mowlam: I made it clear in response to an earlier question that we would continue to transfer prisoners closer to their families because that was in the best interests of the judicial system. This is one of the many issues that have been raised during the talks process and, in considering it, we must also take into account broader questions, such as the pain and suffering felt by the friends and families of those who have been killed. We made announcements last week on exactly that point. We shall continue to consider the merits of each case separately, as we have done up to now.

Mrs. Fyfe: People in Glasgow will very much welcome my right hon. Friend's comments on Jason Campbell. Will she join me in congratulating the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition on its constructive role in the talks? Attitudes such as it brings forward will help the talks move towards a successful conclusion by, we all hope, May next year.

Marjorie Mowlam: May is the date for which we are aiming to reach an accommodation that can be put to the people of Northern Ireland—the final guarantee in the basic principle that guides us is consent: that no decision that comes out of the talks will be acted on until the people of Northern Ireland, the majority of them, have stated their views.

I agree with my hon. Friend that the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition has been a positive force in the talks process. When I turn around and see so many women in the House, I look forward to seeing more women in the political process in Northern Ireland. However, only the actions of all the parties in the talks process, together, reaching an accommodation, will move the process forward. Our wishes must be that the parties must accommodate and work together, otherwise the progress that we would all like to see will not happen.

Mr. Clarke: May I add my congratulations and express my gratitude to my right hon. Friend and—as she said—her team for their sterling work over the summer recess? Will she use this occasion to enlighten the House on the public's mood and response to the all-party talks? We have heard much about what the parties, politicians and media have to say of events in Northern Ireland, but how have the public reacted to the work that has been done over the recess?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. Although, given the chance, many Northern

Ireland hon. Members have their own views on the public mood, the first thing that people say to me when I talk to them is, "Please continue; we must have peace." The second thing that they say is, "Jobs—jobs will make the difference." Those are the two overwhelming messages that one receives. Sometimes, the questions asked in the various polls—although we could quote the *Belfast Telegraph* poll versus the *News Letter* poll and reach different conclusions, as I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House would like to do—produce responses that reveal the amount of fear and distrust in the communities. One can ask any set of questions and discover the fear that people feel. It is therefore up to all those involved in the process to try to build the trust and confidence that ultimately will produce the respect that will move the process further.

Mr. Soley: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the people of Britain and of Ireland are united in wanting the process in Northern Ireland to work and in wishing the people of Northern Ireland well? Does she also accept that the people of Britain and of Ireland greatly admire the efforts made in recent months by her and her team? Both in Britain and in Ireland, however, we also expect something. We expect a very high standard of political leadership in the north—from both Unionist and republican leaders—which, sadly, has sometimes been missing. It seems that a real effort is now being made by both sides, and everyone in the two islands wants to help those leaders in the negotiations—which, preferably, will be finished by 1 May 1998. It is a hard deadline, but it is a goal that they could achieve. They will receive all our support and acclamation if they do so.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and I agree with every word of it.

Mr. Hunter: As the Government believe that confidence-building measures have a part to play in the process, and as those measures include prisoner issues, whose confidence was the Secretary of State trying to build in her recent decision on the case of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright? Is she aware of the anger and resentment that that decision has caused, and that it has undermined the Army's confidence in her?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. Yesterday, I met Army representatives, and they did not mention that point to me. However, that does not mean that the decision was not very difficult, and I do not want in any way to underestimate the matter.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, the matter came across my desk because the previous Government decided to move up the review by the Life Sentence Review Board from 10 to five years. In those circumstances, I examined the case—as it is my job to do—and I made a judgment in the round, based on the conditions that I was faced with. I decided that, for deterrence and retribution for the murder, it was necessary for them to serve six years before the case was again reviewed. I made that decision only because of the role that I must play in such cases.

Mr. Donaldson: Given the Secretary of State's commitment to building confidence, does she share with me the deep concern felt in the Unionist community about the memorandums that were leaked, emanating from the Anglo-Irish secretariat at Maryfield? Does she agree that it shows the secrecy and underhanded dealing in the Government's approach to Northern Ireland? Given the Government's commitment to open government, is it not time that the Maryfield secretariat was closed? Would not its closure do an enormous amount to build confidence in the Unionist community that the Government are even-handed in their approach to Northern Ireland?

Marjorie Mowlam: I begin by condemning the Loyalist Volunteer Force threat to the Irish and the British working at the Anglo-Irish secretariat at Maryfield and I am sure that all hon. Members will join me in doing that. I understand the Unionists' deep concern about the issue and we have discussed it with the Unionist parties. We are committed to openness and transparency. I have reassured the hon. Gentleman and others that we are looking at ways of making things more open, as we are in response to letters from the public in terms of making the talks more open. The difficulty is that, when trying to reach agreements, it is sometimes difficult to put things into the public domain immediately. However, I take the hon. Gentleman's point and we will be as open as we can.

I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's statement that there is underhand activity taking place. There is not. I have said clearly today that there is no hidden agenda. I can assure hon. Members that we will continue to talk and work with the Irish because history has shown that, when the British and Irish Governments work together, more progress can be made.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Would the Secretary of State care to catalogue for the House the amount of illegal weaponry that has so far been decommissioned under the Government's scheme? Would she care to tell the House what the Government understand to be the intention of each of the paramilitary organisations in relation to decommissioning their illegal weaponry?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. We have made it clear on numerous occasions that we would like to see some decommissioning during the talks, in line with the Mitchell report. In case there is any doubt among hon. Members, that is the same position as the previous Government. I pay tribute to General de Chastelain and his colleagues for their work towards that end in the decommissioning commission.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, I can tell the House today that the commission has now presented its initial report to the two Governments. Both Governments have started to consider that report today and I envisage that it will shortly be submitted to the decommissioning sub-committee in the talks. Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman will not be there at the talks to read that. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and the United Kingdom Unionist party have a chance to reconsider their position, because their voice would mean so much more if it was heard at the talks.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Is the Secretary of State aware that her counterpart in the Irish Government, Mr. David Andrews, declared yesterday that the future of the Union was on the table for negotiation and that the representatives of Sinn Fein-IRA have stated that their purpose in the talks is to smash the Union? Is it the

Government's policy to secure and strengthen the Union or to go along with the expressed views of those two participants?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for his question. As the House knows, numerous views have been expressed about the desired outcome of the process. Some want a united Ireland and some want the present situation of the Union to continue. We have said that all options are on the table.

It is important to remember that consent is the guiding principle of this Government in the process. Without the consent of the people, nothing will change. As the hon. and learned Gentleman knows, in the talks process decisions are taken by sufficient consensus, which means that we need a majority of both communities represented by parties in the talks process for any decision to be reached. Above that, any decision that eventually comes out of the process will go to the people of Northern Ireland for a vote in a referendum. It is the majority vote in a referendum that will count. That is consent in practice. From the hon. and learned Gentleman's perspective, that is a guarantee which means that, if one participates in the talks, an accommodation can be reached with which, we hope, both communities can live.

Mr. MacKay: That answer was welcome, because the Secretary of State will be aware that, after her interview with Mr. McCartan in the *Belfast Telegraph* on 28 August, there was real worry in the Province that when she said that consent was not necessarily even numerical or geographic it meant that there was some sliding from the previously announced policy that the consent of the people of Northern Ireland was the only one that counted. Will she re-emphasise that today and say that the interview was a mistake and should no longer be on the record?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. I have made it clear on numerous occasions that there will be no change in Northern Ireland without consent being the guiding principle and without the triple lock and the referendum. I can give the hon. Gentleman an absolute guarantee.

I do not disown the article, for the simple reason that what I was trying to express, and what I obviously expressed badly because of the furore that followed, is that my aim in the talks process is to build a level of consent that is more than just a simple majority on one side. I want a greater level of consensus and consent from the community so that we have a real chance to make the decisions that are reached work.

Comprehensive Spending Review

4. **Mr. Michael J. Foster:** What responses have been received in respect of the Government's consultations on the comprehensive spending review in Northern Ireland. [12409]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Paul Murphy): The Government have invited contributions to the review of spending in Northern Ireland from the local political parties, the 26 Northern Ireland district councils and various bodies, including representatives of trade unions, business and commerce and the voluntary sector. Numerous written contributions have been received which are being considered. I have also received views from contributors at a number of meetings.

Mr. Foster: What benefits does my hon. Friend believe that his extensive consultation process has had for his assessment of Northern Ireland's overall spending needs and priorities?

Mr. Murphy: The chief benefit is that, in line with our policy of open government, the exercise has given people in Northern Ireland an opportunity that they have not had for more than 25 years: the chance to comment on and influence how the Government spend their money and, more important, how we order our priorities in Northern Ireland. In addition, the detailed suggestions from across the entire community in Northern Ireland have proved to be exceptionally helpful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in her review.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Will the Minister confirm that it is a real consultation process and that the present programme of the Government will be changed to take into account the representations that he has received from various delegations and parties in Northern Ireland? If so, will he confirm that political dogma will not override financial common sense? The Department of Education has proposed closing down, or at least is considering the closure of, the preparatory sections of voluntary grammar schools, Roman Catholic and Protestant, where it costs just £20,000 per child, and transferring those sections to state schools, where it costs the state £90,000 per child. Will the Government take into consideration those cost differences?

Mr. Murphy: I can confirm two things to the right hon. Gentleman: first, the comprehensive spending review will indeed be based on common sense and not on dogma and, secondly, there are no plans to close the schools that he has mentioned.

Mr. McGrady: Although the process towards political stability is all important and all absorbing, does the Minister agree that there is an opportunity, even with the peace that we do have, to direct the economy of Northern Ireland towards a more invigorating process, particularly on tourism? Has he had any representations during the financial review on the underfunding of the Northern Ireland tourist board and the industry, given the potential tourist developments open to them?

Mr. Murphy: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point of view. A strategy on tourism in Northern Ireland will be published soon. His concerns will be part of the comprehensive spending review.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Does the Minister recall that during the previous ceasefire, we, in government, were able to reorganise spending because of savings on certain aspects of security because of the ending, temporarily, of hostilities by the IRA? Will he comment on the fact that, unfortunately, the current negotiations are continuing against a background in which Sinn Fein has not demanded that the IRA should give up its illegally held weapons and decommission has not already started?

Would it not have been better for the Prime Minister to understand that he could have got that concession out of Sinn Fein-IRA before he shook hands with its leaders?

Mr. Murphy: Only yesterday, there was a report from the independent commissioners on decommissioning. It will be available to all parties, including the hon. Gentleman's party. It is of course important to consider any savings that can be made as a direct result of the peace process.

Mr. Godman: As part of that exercise, can we expect an early review of the targeting social need programme? I would argue that such a review is essential to tackle the widespread poverty in both communities.

Mr. Murphy: I accept my hon. Friend's point; targeting social need will certainly be part of the comprehensive spending review and the backcloth to all the decisions that we take.

Beef Industry

5. **Mr. Paice:** If she will make a statement about the state of the beef industry in Northern Ireland. [12411]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tony Worthington): There has been a gradual recovery in consumer demand for Northern Ireland beef during 1997. In spite of that, average market prices for most of the year to date have remained below those in 1996 and the total return to beef farmers in 1997 is likely to fall by 10 per cent. to 12 per cent. compared with 1996.

Mr. Paice: I thank the Minister for that response. Given that Northern Ireland already has a computerised database for cattle tracing and that such a system was a requirement of the veterinary advisory committee to the Commission for the implementation of a certified herds scheme, is it the Government's intention to seek a lifting of the export ban through a certified herds system for beef from Northern Ireland, as opposed to beef from the rest of the United Kingdom, and in advance of a system for the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Worthington: It was a UK ban and the UK ban has to be lifted, but one of the proposals put forward is that an indication that herds are BSE free can be made through the system that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. As parts of the United Kingdom qualify for coming out of the ban, that will occur; but Northern Ireland herds are currently at that stage.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Dismore:** If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 29 October. [12435]

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. I shall have further meetings later today.

Mr. Dismore: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the fact that, in the former Chancellor, there is at least one person on the Opposition Benches who will make a decision on economic and monetary union in accordance with the national interest? As the former Chancellor is so at odds with his own leader, would he not be well advised at least to turn up for the next woolly jumper bonding session?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. I believe that we can build a national consensus behind the position that the Government set out on Monday. That position is: if it is successful and the economic benefits are clear and unambiguous, Britain should be part of a single currency; it is not realistic to join during this Parliament, but we should prepare now to be able to join early in the next Parliament if the single currency works and those economic tests are fulfilled. I am delighted that the former Chancellor—whatever his desire to move more quickly—can see the need to join across political parties and put a clear position to the country, because it is the national interest, not Conservative party divisions, that should determine the issue.

Mr. Hague: Does the Prime Minister recall being asked in the *Evening Standard* during the election campaign:

> "Will Labour introduce tuition fees for higher education?"

Does he recall replying:

> "Labour has no plans to introduce tuition fees for higher education"?

Does he regret that now?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not, because I made it clear that we would await the outcome of the Dearing committee, which we did.

Mr. Hague: Is not the fact of the matter that the Prime Minister said one thing before the election and is now doing the opposite afterwards? Does he understand why hundreds of thousands of students and families feel misled? Is he regretting that and is he going to give them an apology?

The Prime Minister: No. I made it clear throughout that we should abide by the recommendations of the Dearing committee, which was set up by the Conservative Government. There is a very simple choice: either we decide to lift the cap on student numbers and get more finance to the front line of the universities, or we reform the system. We have to reform the system to improve the situation in higher education. That is what we have said throughout.

Mr. Hague: It would be one thing if the Prime Minister said that he would abide by the recommendations of the Dearing report if that was what he intended to do, but is he not ignoring that report by abolishing the maintenance grants for students from poorer families? Under his proposals, poorer families will be the hardest hit. Will not that make it harder for them to send their children to university? Is not that a breach of trust—and the wrong thing to do?

The Prime Minister: No. The right hon. Gentleman is wrong on every point. As a result of our proposals, the poorest families will be exempt from tuition fees—they would not be under Dearing. What is more, repayments will begin at a higher level of income. That will help poorer families too. The truth is that the Conservative Government set up the Dearing committee and now the right hon. Gentleman is walking away from the recommendations of his own committee.

Mr. Hague: Does not the Prime Minister see that it is he who is walking away from those recommendations and that this is a matter of whom people can trust? [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Yes, it is. Does he recall being asked on the same day:

> "Will Labour tax pension funds?"

Does he recall replying, also in the *Evening Standard*:

> "Our public expenditure plans require no extra taxation"?

Now that the right hon. Gentleman has clobbered pension funds with £5 billion of extra taxation a year, does he agree that he misled millions of future pensioners as well as future students?

The Prime Minister: No, we were tackling the Budget deficit left by the Conservative Government. I am intrigued by this line of questioning, as we were told on the news a little earlier that the right hon. Gentleman would ask me about monetary union. I just wonder why he is not asking me about monetary union.

Mr. Hague: It is my job to decide on the questions and the right hon. Gentleman's job to provide answers. He is the Prime Minister and he is meant to give the answers. If he does not think that these subjects are important to millions of families, he has another think coming.

Is it not becoming clear that this Government practise politics without values, politics without conscience, and politics without principles? Is not the lesson to be drawn by the whole country the fact that if people trust this Government today they pay for it tomorrow?

The Prime Minister: We are witnessing a Leader of the Opposition who is so scared that he does not even dare ask the question about monetary union which he said this lunchtime he was going to ask—

Hon. Members: Answer.

Madam Speaker: Order. I need some Zubes around here, with all these gentlemen shouting. May we have some calm, please?

The Prime Minister: There are some good candidates for that advice on the Conservative Benches, certainly.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about principles. We remember the principles of the previous Government: the national health service, which they wrecked and undermined, the school system that they let down, their promise never to put VAT on fuel, which they then put on fuel. We remember a party so rottenly divided that it could not make up its mind on monetary union—and dare not ask a question about it today.

Q2. **Mrs. Humble:** I welcome today's announcement of additional funding for the national health service. It will mean an extra £12 million for the health authority covering my constituency, among others. What steps do the Government intend to take to modernise the delivery of health care and to tackle the underlying causes of ill health? [12436]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: today's allocations amount, over this year and the next year, to more than £1.5 billion more for the health service under a Labour Government than under the Conservative spending plans.

We shall also invite every health authority and council in England to bid to become one of the new health action zones, which will work through joint management of budgets and one-stop health centres. The zones will bring together the professionals—general practitioners, pharmacists, community nurses, social workers and others—and the idea is that they will be able to find fresh, better ways of delivering health service care for the future.

We are not only putting in the extra investment that our health service needs—far in excess of that which would have been put in by the Conservatives—but modernising and improving the health service.

Mr. Ashdown: I will ask a question about monetary union. Is not the significance of the statement made by the Chancellor on Monday not as much its time scale as its clear and unequivocal expression of support in principle for the single currency and for Britain's joining it?

The Prime Minister believes that the Government will take that decision later rather than earlier. I think he is wrong; I think it will come at him much faster then he believes. He may believe that the decision, to be driven by the national interest, may be taken after the next general election, but will he at least admit that if it is in the national interest for it to be taken earlier, there is nothing to prevent that happening?

The Prime Minister: We simply do not believe that it is in the country's interests. That is why we said that we do not propose to enter a single currency in this Parliament. The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that in principle we have said that there are benefits in a single currency and in a single market. That is precisely why we have set out the very clear statement that the Chancellor made on Monday—so that we have a framework in which we can move forward in future.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister not realise that it is illogical to say in one breath that this decision will be taken in the national interest and to say in the next that it will be driven by the electoral agenda? That makes no sense. Will the Prime Minister at least agree with the former Chancellor to this extent: that if the Government now set a clear and decisive lead on this matter, they have nothing to fear from a referendum, even an early one, because the decision to enter the single currency will enjoy such cross-party support in the House, and such wide support in the country, including from the Trades Union Congress and the Confederation of British Industry, that that referendum can be run as soon as the Government call it in the national interest?

The Prime Minister: Yes, but the crucial test is the national economic interest and at the present time, as we have made clear and as the Treasury assessment that we published on Monday makes clear, our economy simply is not convergent with the other European economies. That is why it is not in our interests to join and, indeed, on the basis of the Treasury assessment, we shall not be convergent for some period of years. That is why the Chancellor set out a framework of stability where all the central issues of principle are answered, but where we give business a clear framework within which to plan ahead.

All the way through, it is not a political set of considerations that drive this; it is a determination of the national economic interest. That is what is important.

If you like, Madam Speaker, there are two groups of people with whom I would disagree although they hold perfectly principled positions. One says that we should go into a single currency, come what may, irrespective of the economic circumstances; I disagree with that. The other is the view now taken by the Conservative party: to rule out in principle going into a single currency even if it will bring economic benefits to Britain.

In my view, the sensible thing to say is that the test must be clear and unambiguous economic benefit to Britain, and that is the test on which we shall take the decision.

Mr. Cash: On Monday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, disgracefully, refused to address the political and constitutional implications of the single currency. Does the Prime Minister agree that the British people deserve an explanation of those constitutional political implications in principle? Will he give the British people a White Paper in which he sets those out? Does he accept that, if he does not do so, although he may be walking on water as far as domestic politics are concerned, he will drown in Europe?

The Prime Minister: First, may I thank the hon. Gentleman for all his help at the general election? Secondly, may I tell him that I would have been delighted to answer the constitutional issues if they had been put to me by the Leader of the Opposition—as we were told on the lunchtime news they would be?

The answer is very simple. Of course constitutional issues are at stake, but in the end the question is whether they operate as a constitutional bar to joining if the economic benefits are clear and unambiguous. Our answer to that is that there is no constitutional bar. What is the Opposition's answer?

Q3. **Mrs. Ballard:** My constituent, 19-year-old James Humphreys, received a two-and-a-half-year prison sentence for a first offence of purchasing Ecstasy tablets for friends. I do not condone his actions, but his imprisonment and exposure to hardened criminals could blight his whole future. Will the Prime Minister now respond to the chorus of advice, not least from senior police officers and judges, that a royal commission is urgently needed to look into the use and abuse of drugs in society and the appropriateness of mandatory prison sentencing? [12437]

The Prime Minister: I am sorry that I cannot agree with the hon. Lady. I accept that she should want to raise an issue of concern to her constituency but, as far as I am aware, the individual concerned was charged and convicted of intent to supply drugs. People who supply or intend to supply drugs should expect to be severely punished. In relation to the bigger issue of drug abuse, the Government already have an independent statutory adviser in the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. Secondly, we appointed recently an anti-drugs co-ordinator, Keith Hellawell, a former chief constable, who will formulate, with the Government, a strategy to combat drug misuse. Given the number of young people who have died as a result of drug abuse over the past few years, we would be foolish to proceed on this matter other than with very great caution.

Mr. Hope: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, nowadays, many young people leave school unprepared for taking on the challenges of becoming parents? Could not we develop the school curriculum to allow young people to learn more about parenthood in the classroom, better to prepare them for adult life?

The Prime Minister: I agree that it is extremely important that we try, in the course of the schooling that we give our children, to teach them about the obligations of parenthood. It would be best if those things were learnt in the home as well.

Q4. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** The Labour party has announced that the Government will introduce legislation to incorporate the European convention on human rights into English law. Does the Prime Minister accept that

> "Democracy demands that the fundamental rules governing citizens' behaviour, and the fundamental rights protecting citizens' freedoms, should be decided by Parliament and not by the judges"?

I quote the late John Smith. Why are the Prime Minister and the Government ignoring those wise words? [12438]

The Prime Minister: I see the Foreign Secretary nodding his head—*[Interruption.]* Rather, the shadow Foreign Secretary—let us not be presumptuous. I must say, however, that the shadow Lord Chancellor agrees with that proposal. Perhaps there should be a little more bonding on that one.

Mr. Winterton: I was not there.

The Prime Minister: I always knew that the hon. Gentleman was a man of judgment. What is important about that issue is that it repatriates decisions to this country. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] It is not rubbish. At the moment, people can sue under the European convention on human rights but they must go abroad—to Strasbourg—to do it. Our proposal means that they can exercise the right here at home, in our courts.

Q5. **Mr. Winnick:** Is not there the best chance since 1920 for peace in Northern Ireland arising from the current talks? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if all sides put forward their maximum demand and show no flexibility or accommodation, not only will it be extremely disappointing but it will be a tragedy for the people of Northern Ireland, the large majority of whom yearn—there is no other word to describe it—for a lasting peace? [12439]

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I pay tribute to all the work that he has done over a number of years to speak out on these issues, which he has done with great commitment. What he says is absolutely true: the only way we shall get a lasting political settlement in Northern Ireland is if people put the ancient enmities aside and realise that there is a broad measure of agreement on what a future political settlement may look like. If we ensure that the overwhelming majority of moderate people, not the small groups of extremists, determine the agenda, we shall get the result that we need.

Q6. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** When I worked at the Child Poverty Action Group, there was widespread support for the director, who is now the Minister for Welfare Reform. Does that Minister have the Prime Minister's support for thinking the unthinkable and proposing pension improvements? He has consistently said that there can be no pension reform while the state earnings-related pension scheme remains, but the Prime Minister has declared himself in favour of SERPS. Are those positions consistent? [12440]

The Prime Minister: I have complete confidence in my right hon. Friend's duties. He will issue a Green Paper on the matter shortly and I suggest that the right hon. Lady read it.

Q7. **Mr. Burden:** My right hon. Friend will be aware of the two dreadful recent firework accidents in the west midlands; one in which 14-year-old James Townsend suffered severe injuries to his hands because of a banger, the other in which 24 people were injured at a bonfire party. Does he agree that that proves that the Government were right to introduce tough new firework safety regulations and that we now need to move on to a proper, recognised training scheme for people who want to operate firework displays? In the run-up to bonfire night, we must ensure that the fun is put back into fireworks and the danger taken out of them. [12441]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. The new firework regulations, which represent the toughest crackdown on dangerous fireworks in the history of the United Kingdom, will make a significant contribution to safety. I therefore share my hon. Friend's welcome for these measures. The Fireworks Bill that is to be introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy) will provide the Government with the capability to deal with a number of fireworks issues that are outside the scope of present regulations. I greatly welcome her initiative.

Mr. Jack: The Prime Minister has often spoken of his commitment to the national health service. I hope that he will agree that a plentiful supply of new doctors coming into the service is vital for its future. If he agrees with that proposition, what does he say to the British Medical Association, which has strongly criticised his proposals on tuition fees for those embarking on six-year medical courses, as the BMA believes that tuition fees will discourage many people from offering themselves for training as doctors?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong. First, we have protected those coming into the medical profession. Secondly, in contrast to the Government of whom he was a member, we are putting an extra £1.5 billion into the national health service.

Q8. **Mr. Pickthall:** Did my right hon. Friend notice that in yesterday's debate the Conservative spokesman on defence, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), said that anti-personnel land mines saved lives? Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to reassert that the Government's policy is to save lives by getting rid of land mines, not finding excuses for them? [12442]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. We have made clear our commitment to a complete ban on anti-personnel land mines. We are banning them in the UK and we intend to sign the Ottawa convention in December banning them internationally. We accept that not all users of land mines will sign the Ottawa convention, but we will encourage them to do so and look for other ways in which to engage all states in a global ban. That is long overdue, it is right and it has the overwhelming support of the public, not only in Britain but throughout the world, and we shall play our full part in bringing it about.

Q9. **Mr. Beggs:** Will the Prime Minister and the Government consider urgently what financial assistance they may give Larne borough council in my constituency, which has been offered £2.5 million by the Millennium Commission to develop a spectacular sea cliff path at the Gobbins in Islandmagee? Matching funding of £2.5 million would impose too big a burden on local ratepayers and we may lose the opportunity to develop a national tourist attraction. Can the Prime Minister help to bring together central Government and local government so that we maximise the benefit of millennium funding? [12443]

The Prime Minister: Of course we shall consider carefully all the points raised by the hon. Gentleman. I know that he met Lord Dubs, the Minister responsible for environment and agriculture in the Northern Ireland Office, on 11 September to promote the case for funding the project. It was made clear at that meeting that the Government are enormously constrained in funding terms as to what we can provide. However, as we promised at the meeting, officials from the Department of the Environment and Agriculture are today meeting Larne borough council to consider how best the council might advance the project. We support the project, but we must try to do so within public finance constraints.

Q10. **Mr. Mitchell:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of the footballs that British kids play with are made in Sialkot in Pakistan by other children—many of them as young as five or six—who work as bonded labour in sweated conditions for as little as 10p an hour? Will he do all he can to ensure that the brave initiative taken by the Secretary of State for International Development and FIFA to bring an end to that abuse is carried through as quickly as possible and is extended to other industries that use sweated labour to produce sporting goods for the British market? [12444]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: I welcome very much the initiative taken by the Secretary of State, who is in Oslo today attending a conference on child labour. I also welcome the fact that FIFA has got behind the initiative.

As a result of the funded initiative that the Government have announced, we hope to help some 7,000 children move from bonded labour to proper education and skills training. This is a problem not just in Pakistan but throughout the developing world, and we shall do everything we can to build on and advance the initiative. I think that it will have the support of the vast majority of people.

Q11. **Mr. Whittingdale:** Can the Prime Minister explain why the Secretary of State for Social Security said in January that she would not implement any cuts in single parent benefit and yet, only a few weeks after the general election, introduced legislation that will cut single parent benefit? Is that not another breach of trust by the Government? [12445]

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman forgets that the Government he supported introduced the cut. The Secretary of State made it absolutely clear, before and after the election, that we must keep within the tough spending guidelines we set out because of the mess that we inherited from the previous Government. However, we have introduced a very important £200 million programme for single parents. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman take up the cut with those who introduced it: the previous Conservative Government.

Dr. Starkey: My right hon. Friend may be aware that in my Milton Keynes constituency a project of reparative youth justice has been in operation for some time. It has demonstrated considerable success in getting young people and their parents to face responsibility for their crimes and cut the rate of reoffending. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is imperative that the Home Secretary's proposals to extend that sort of approach to youth justice nationwide are implemented as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: I agree. My hon. Friend will know that the Home Secretary gave his full support today to extending that scheme. It is part of a series of measures that are being taken to tighten the juvenile justice system and part of a system to ensure that final warnings are given to young people so that they know exactly where they stand. It is also part of our proposals to halve the time it takes to bring juvenile offenders to court to be dealt with and properly punished. It is one of a series of measures that allow us to address the causes of crime through better employment and skills training for young people and to ensure that those who commit crimes and terrorise people are dealt with properly and firmly through the criminal justice system.

Harrogate and Knaresborough

Q12. **Mr. Willis:** When he intends to visit Harrogate and Knaresborough. [12446]

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to visit the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but I intend to continue to make visits to all regions of the country.

Mr. Willis: I assure the Prime Minister that he would be extremely welcome in Harrogate and Knaresborough. If he visited my constituency, he would discover one of the finest conference and exhibition businesses in the United Kingdom, which is wholly public sector-owned by the local authority. To protect some 5,000 jobs and more than 300 businesses, we need to build a new exhibition hall, but without trading credit approvals—which is the best way to secure finance for such local government development—those jobs cannot be protected. Is the Prime Minister prepared to support greater public sector involvement in new exhibition facilities?

The Prime Minister: I think I would be in some trouble if I just answered yes to that question. The Chancellor is sitting next to me. We will consider the case that has been made very carefully. I know Harrogate very well and the tremendous facilities that are there but, as the hon. Gentleman would expect me to say, any help that is given must be given within the financial constraints under which the Government operate.

Engagements

Q13. **Mr. Savidge:** As I am the first Scottish Member to ask the Prime Minister a question since the result of our historic referendum, does my right hon. Friend agree that, given the clear and decisive mandate that we received from the people of Scotland, Parliament should proceed as swiftly as possible to establish the Scottish Parliament? [12447]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We were delighted with the result in the Scottish referendum and today the programme of constitutional change is being taken further with details of proposals for London, so that London people can have a proper, strategic authority and an elected mayor to oversee the issues of concern to people in London. It is all part of a process of bringing government closer to the people, ending the era of big government and ensuring that we get a constitution fit for the 21st century.

Q14. **Dr. Michael Clark:** Does the Prime Minister recall that, almost exactly five years ago, several Conservative Members went out on a limb to help the coal industry? Is he aware that the coal contracts come up for re-signing in the spring and that if there is not a satisfactory agreement several pits could close? Does he think that many hon. Members on Government Benches will go out on a limb to help the coal industry this time round? [12448]

The Prime Minister: I pay tribute to the work that the hon. Gentleman has always done in support of the coal industry, although any lectures from the Conservative party on the future of the coal industry are a little rich. Of course we understand the problem that the particular company he refers to faces, but we have to ensure that the prices that are being offered are properly competitive.

Magistrates Courts

3.30 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the organisation of magistrates courts. My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor is making a similar statement in another place.

Magistrates and magistrates courts are critical to our criminal justice system. There are now more than 30,000 lay magistrates, and 90 stipendiary or professional magistrates, divided between the metropolitan stipendiary bench, serving inner London, and the provincial bench, serving the rest of England and Wales. The magistracy deals with about 97 per cent. of criminal offences prosecuted in England and Wales. It also has important family and local licensing jurisdictions. That is why it is vital that they are supported by policies that look to the next century—not back to the 19th century.

Arrangements for the management and funding of magistrates courts were enacted by Parliament in 1949. The previous Government brought forward proposals designed to clarify and improve the accountability of the magistrates courts system, through part IV of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994. A statutory responsibility was put on local magistrates courts committees, comprising magistrates selected by their colleagues, for the efficient and effective administration of the courts in their areas. It established the role of a justices chief executive as chief administrative officer responsible to each MCC. It also provided new powers for the Lord Chancellor, including one to initiate proposals for amalgamating MCC areas and implementing them where, after consultation, he considers that an amalgamation would be likely to lead to an overall increase in the efficiency of the administration of the courts in the area.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor is committed to making these arrangements serve modern needs in support of both lay and professional magistrates alike. The hard work and dedication to justice of the lay magistracy is undoubted. We have no plans for a replacement of the lay magistracy with stipendiary magistrates. Our aim is to deploy the resources of the lay and the stipendiary magistracy to best effect.

Our objectives therefore are, first, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the magistrates courts and, secondly, to reduce delay in the time taken for cases to be taken through those courts, and thereby honour our manifesto commitment. My right hon. and noble Friend's announcement today will help achieve these objectives through improved co-ordination and communication between the different agencies working in the criminal justice system, so as to improve the management of the system as a whole; better distribution and use of the public resources that the Government commit to the magistrates courts as an integral part of the processes for delivering justice; and better and more flexible deployment of professional judicial resources.

The provisions of the 1994 Act have yet to be implemented in a way that achieves significant improvement in the organisation and management of the magistrates courts throughout England and Wales. For too long we have been driving with the brakes on. We need to create a modern structure, which provides the right local management within a national framework. We will continue to look afresh across the structures, processes and objectives of the criminal justice system. That process is not yet complete and it may produce still more radical options. But there is work that needs to be started now, and much can be achieved using the powers we already have.

There are 96 MCCs in England and Wales. They cover very different geographical areas, in many instances unrelated to the areas covered by other agencies involved in the criminal justice system and serving widely differing numbers of magistrates, staff and court buildings. As Her Majesty's chief inspector of the magistrates courts service states in her annual report for 1996-97, which has today been lodged in the Library:

> "In several of our 1996/97 inspection reports, we concluded that small MCC areas were managing their affairs competently within the grant allocated to them. However, without detracting from their achievement, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the existence of so many small organisational units is not in the best interest of a well-functioning Service nation-wide. In our view, overall improvement will only be achieved through a structure with fewer MCCs which are comparable in terms of workload and resources."

In the Government's view, there need to be fewer, and larger, MCC areas, providing a more consistent basis for the administration and management of the courts, and a much greater alignment with the local government areas served by other agencies in the criminal justice system—for example, the Crown Prosecution Service and police authorities—wherever that is appropriate. That requires a substantial programme of amalgamations of MCC areas.

Such an outcome is likely to lead to an overall increase in efficiency, both for the management of the courts themselves and for the wider criminal justice system. A greater coincidence of boundaries between the agencies should lead to administrative benefits, including the implementation of consistent and coherent policies throughout the area, for example, in fast-tracking particular types of case, which depends on effective co-operation between the various criminal justice agencies.

I have been struck in government by the extent to which delivery of objectives on which everyone is agreed in principle depends on effective co-operation among a large number of different agencies. Immediately after the general election, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General asked the Director of Public Prosecutions to work out proposals for dividing the CPS into 42 areas to match existing police authority areas. She did so, and those proposals were announced in a written answer on 21 May 1997. Therefore, we have 42 CPS areas, 43 police forces and 96 separate independent administrative units in the magistrates courts system. I am not trying to establish administrative symmetry for its own sake, but I have to ask whether 96 separate administrative units in the magistrates courts are really necessary.

I want to make it plain that this is not about losing local courts. It is about being open-minded about the best way of providing administrative support to them. We are not planning mindlessly to sweep away tradition; we are striving for a justice system at least as good as any in the world. There is much that is good about our current arrangements, not least the involvement of intelligent,

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committed volunteers as magistrates. What we want to do is build on the high quality which is already there, to secure the best possible service for the British people.

We are committed to local justice. Many decisions, for example about providing courthouses to match need, will properly remain to be taken at local level, but justice delivered locally is not the same as justice organised locally. In my clear view, local management requires a national framework.

The voluntary amalgamations that have occurred to date have shown the benefits that can be achieved. They include a fresh approach to the organisation of MCCs, with a reduction in the number of sub-committees and the establishment of clear levels of delegation to officers; better strategic planning in relation to the use of magistrates, staff and buildings, with an estate of sufficient size and flexibility to make the task mean something; better performance monitoring and the networking of performance initiatives; access to specialist staff, which the individual committees could not previously have supported; and the ability to review and standardise staffing policies and bring about other administrative efficiencies through rationalisation of functions previously duplicated by staff within the individual committees.

Our policy, therefore, is to promote a reduction in the number of MCC areas, which will involve a greater alignment of the MCC areas with those areas served by the Crown Prosecution Service and by the police. That provides a model and is the starting point for our consideration of MCC areas. My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor will issue consultation papers on the amalgamation of MCC areas with a view to being in a position to make an amalgamation order under section 32 of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997 where that is justified.

Our first priority is to consider the position of the metropolitan MCCs, which currently include the largest number of small MCCs. We believe that the greatest scope for the largest efficiency gains lies in pooling their resources. We shall start the necessary consultative process with a view to having new shadow MCCs up and running on 1 April 1998, with a second phase on 1 April 1999.

In the shire counties, there remain some parts of the country where MCC areas do not align with the police and CPS boundaries, and, as appropriate, we shall introduce proposals on those MCCs.

Greater London provides its own problems, substantially because of the effects of the abolition of the Greater London council and successive changes to local government in that area. The Lord Chancellor has yet to receive and consider the interim review of the outer London strategic management body. However, the service cannot afford to wait until 1999 before any consideration is given to the way forward for outer London. We are examining appropriate ways to organise magistrates courts across the huge area of the metropolitan constabulary. If we are to achieve our national objectives for the service in London as a whole, we shall need to propose changes that tie in with those being introduced by the CPS in the area.

We have also been giving careful consideration to a better and more flexible use of the professional judicial resources available in the magistrates courts. Stipendiary magistrates are, by statute, appointed either to London or to a particular commission area: they do not have a national jurisdiction. We shall consult shortly on the desirability of creating a single, unified stipendiary bench that would enhance the efficiency with which stipendiary magistrates could respond to changes in national work load patterns. We shall also consult on whether the role that stipendiary magistrates now fulfil could be more accurately reflected in a change of judicial title: they are, after all, professional judges, and the word "magistrate" is most naturally associated in the public's mind with the lay magistracy.

We have been persuaded by representations from, among others, the Magistrates Association that our policy should be to encourage greater separation within the senior management of the magistrates courts, in particular between their administrative and legal functions. Justices clerks and all those advising magistrates in individual cases need to be able to concentrate on this important function.

Managing a modern magistrates courts service is an administrative function which requires dedicated administrators fully engaged on that task. To improve the status of those who provide legal advice to magistrates, we shall consult on the proposal that, in future, court clerks should be professionally qualified either as a barrister or as a solicitor. If it would help, we are prepared to consider a change of title to recognise their proper role in a modern magistrates courts system.

It is also our policy to ensure that dual appointments, where the same individual is both the justices chief executive and justices clerk with substantive legal responsibilities, will become exceptional. In any event, amalgamations will lead to MCC areas of a sufficient size to support a stand-alone justices chief executive and the appropriate number of justices clerks for the area.

Let me now deal with matters that are consequential to what I have said so far. Today, I lodged in the Library of the House a copy of the magistrates courts service inspectorate's report on the review of the proposal to amalgamate Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull magistrates courts committees. The chief inspector identifies the efficiency gains that could accrue from the rationalisation of the senior management structures in the area. She refers to the potential for new strategic thinking, reduced management overheads, sharing of initiatives, greater staff specialisation and better use of staff generally. She recommends that Ministers should actively pursue a reduction in the number of MCC areas, and that a new national strategy be developed to contribute to the better functioning of the criminal justice system as a whole. She does not recommend that Ministers proceed with the particular compulsory amalgamation of the three MCCs at this time. My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor has broadly accepted her conclusions. He does not intend to proceed with the proposal to amalgamate the three MCCs of Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull, as that proposal is not wholly consistent with the strategy that I have outlined so far.

Associated with those changes will be other measures that we shall introduce to improve the national framework. The Department is currently reviewing the grant allocation formula; we intend to introduce a new formula for 1999-2000, which will be better able to meet needs while recognising performance, and which will distribute the available resources more fairly. We shall introduce a requirement for MCCs in relation to the reports and plans that they are to produce and the performance standards that they are to maintain. Their operations will be supported by new information technology services currently being negotiated with suppliers, which will provide a more effective means of delivering information across the criminal justice system.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor will shortly be issuing consultation papers proposing the amalgamation of the seven MCCs in the west midlands area, and the five MCCs in Merseyside. If those proposals are implemented, they will result in MCCs in those two areas with common boundaries with the police authorities and new CPS areas. We will follow that up with further consultation papers as and when appropriate, proposing further amalgamations when that might achieve the benefits that I have described. I shall write to the chairmen of the relevant MCCs inviting them to submit proposals and indicating when, in the absence of their proposals, we intend to launch our own consultation under section 32(5) of the Act. As I have said, we shall also issue a consultation paper shortly on unifying the metropolitan and provincial stipendiary benches.

With today's announcement, the Government are embarking on a plan of action to improve the operation of the magistrates courts. We are determined to create a modern structure that will provide the right local management within a national framework. That will enable the courts to play their part in a properly co-ordinated criminal justice system, better able to deliver our promise to reduce delay throughout the system.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I have no quarrel with the broad objectives set out in the statement. I take this opportunity to salute the work of the voluntary lay magistracy, which deals with the vast majority of criminal cases.

To marry the boundaries of police, CPS and MCC areas must be sensible. Does the Minister accept, however, that magistrates courts represent local provision of justice? Can he assure the House that his plans will not lead to the closing of a huge number of magistrates courts, particularly in rural areas, and the distancing of courts from the local communities that they serve? Can he tell us today precisely how many courts he expects to be closed following the announcements?

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is no need to change the title "stipendiary magistrate", which is a clear and easily understandable term? I urge him, however, to consider appointing more such magistrates, especially if they are to have jurisdiction right across England and Wales.

I suspect that there is a drawer in the Government Chief Whip's office marked "Statements that we do not need to make, but which will be required when we need to delay the business of the House". Was not the real purpose of making this largely uncontroversial statement today to allow the Prime Minister to sneak out of the Chamber so that he could avoid coming face to face with my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), who is about to take his seat—having won a memorable by-election victory over the Prime Minister's personally chosen candidate, despite two well-publicised visits by the right hon. Gentleman to the constituency during the by-election campaign?

If the Minister genuinely wanted to make a statement touching on his Department today, why did he not make one to the House about his proposals to reform legal aid—which have far-reaching social and legal consequences for the people of this country—rather than wasting 15 or 16 minutes drawing out a largely uncontroversial set of words about magistrates courts?

Mr. Hoon: It is always difficult for the Government to get it right for the Opposition. Had we chosen to deal with the matter by way of a written question, tucked away in some obscure page of *Hansard*, no doubt the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) would have been leaping to his feet complaining that we were not making a statement. We have made a statement and given hon. Members the opportunity to ask questions of the Government on this important matter relating to the delivery of local justice.

The hon. and learned Member will know that 97 per cent. of all criminal cases begin and end in magistrates courts, so he must be aware of the importance of the proposals. He says that he has no quarrel with the Government's broader objectives and I am grateful for his support, but it is important that he emphasises to Back-Bench Conservative Members that court closures are not a necessary consequence of the proposals. Whether courts should close is primarily a matter for local magistrates courts committees. They take that decision. It is determined at local level and it is important that it stays at local level.

The hon. and learned Gentleman knows as well as I do that the only role that the Lord Chancellor has in this matter is to determine an appeal, in the event of one being made—that is the limit of the Lord Chancellor's jurisdiction. It is important that, instead of trying to make a few cheap local headlines, the hon. and learned Gentleman reflects the generality of the law in this sector.

I was disappointed that the hon. and learned Gentleman did not recognise the need to change the title of stipendiary magistrate. We are determined to consult on the matter. The term "stipendiary magistrate" is not well recognised; it is not recognised as being a judicial office. It is important that we try to bring up to date the titles that we give to people, particularly where they deal with as important a matter as criminal jurisdiction.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my hon. Friend aware that he should be careful about amalgamating magistrates courts in his constituency, in mine and in other parts of Britain because amalgamation and making things bigger does not always work? Invariably, it is the opposite. To find out that that is true, we have to look only at the changing of the national health service in the 1970s under the Government of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), at the local authority reorganisation and, latterly, at the closing of tribunal areas that are controlled by the Benefits Agency, which has resulted in a massive backlog of people wanting to be represented in those places.

However my hon. Friend deals with the matter, he has to bear in mind the fact that, although, as he says, magistrates decide whether courts remain open, they need

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money and that if there is a shortage of money, those courts will undoubtedly close. Labour Members represent many rural areas now, as a party needs to in order to achieve a majority in the House of Commons. Remember, there is a vast difference between the anonymity of a city and the villages and small towns represented by Labour Members.

Mr. Hoon: I have always been most grateful for the thoughtful and well-considered advice that my hon. Friend has tendered to me over many years. I assure him that the proposals for the amalgamation of magistrates courts committees will not have the slightest effect in his constituency in Derbyshire and in my constituency in Nottinghamshire because, in those areas, there is already consistency between the magistrates courts committee, the police authority area and the CPS. We are trying to introduce that best practice, already operating in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, throughout the rest of the country.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Magistrates dispense justice in the community, and that should be done and be seen to be done in the community. We are concerned that there are likely to be closures of magistrates courts, especially in rural areas. What criteria are considered by the Government when an appeal is lodged against closure?

Mr. Hoon: May I make it clear that, as I have already said, decisions on courthouse closures are primarily matters for local magistrates courts committees. The hon. Gentleman rightly emphasises the importance of justice being done and being seen to be done in the community. However, he is in some difficulty in arguing that such decisions should be taken anywhere else. If he came to me and said that he would not like a particular court to be closed on appeal to the Lord Chancellor, he would be saying that central Government should interfere in those local decisions. It is only when a local decision to close a court is made that the matter ends up on the Lord Chancellor's desk. In those circumstances, we are guaranteeing local justice.

I appreciate that there are appeals to the Lord Chancellor, but there are no specific criteria and each appeal has to be dealt with on its merits, which will depend on the grounds of the appeal. I can give the hon. Gentleman some of the considerations that will be taken into account. They are, in particular, the provision of modern facilities, facilities for the disabled, security arrangements in relation to violent offenders, and separate waiting areas for defendants and witnesses. There is also the question of delays. How can we ensure the provision of courtrooms that are best suited to enable cases to be listed in a manner that will achieve the Government's aim of reducing delays in the criminal justice system? We must take account of necessary renovations to bring the courthouse in question up to a modern standard. We also recognise the distance that people will have to travel, the cost of that travel and the time that is taken to complete the return journey. Such a range of factors is taken into account.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. As is clear to the House, many hon. Members wish to put questions. If I am to attempt to call even two thirds of them, I must have brief questions and, especially, brief answers.

Mr. Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): What advantages does my hon. Friend see in the redrawing of the boundaries? He said that he was not simply redrawing them for administrative tidiness. What benefits will arise by having the boundaries of the Crown Prosecution Service coincide with the magistrates courts area and police authority boundaries?

Mr. Hoon: The primary aim is to secure maximum co-operation between the different parts of the criminal justice system, leading to a reduction in the number of participants in consultation and in the amount of paperwork to be circulated, and to a more effective presentation of the concerns of magistrates courts. If we are to achieve our manifesto commitment to fast-track justice, we must ensure that the different agencies involved in the criminal justice system work consistently and coherently together. The proposals will achieve that.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in the composition of the magistrates bench, while it is important to try to ensure a broad spectrum of occupation and background, the political views of applicants for the magistracy should be ignored? In that context, does he understand the dismay that has been caused by his right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor who told the Magistrates Association that, all things being equal, if there were an imbalance he would choose Labour voters for magistrates?

Mr. Hoon: The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that it is important for the magistracy to reflect the local community. It was for that reason that his Government began to ask magistrates about their political allegiance. That was to try to ensure the consistent reflection of the needs of a local community. All that the Lord Chancellor said in the speech to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman refers is that it is important in reflecting the balance of a local community to have a balance in the political views of the magistracy. However, that information was first collected by the right hon. and learned Gentleman's Government.

Ms Beverley Hughes (Stretford and Urmston): I welcome the proposals outlined today, particularly for the amalgamation of MCC areas, the administrative benefits of which I am sure we can all see, but will my hon. Friend say a little more about how he expects those changes to reduce delays in the system, with particular reference to the new IT services that he mentioned?

Mr. Hoon: Reducing delays in the criminal justice system is a centrepiece of the Government's policy and it was a centrepiece of our manifesto. It is crucial that, in trying to reduce delay, we ensure that the various agencies work together. IT strategy is part of that. For the moment, unfortunately, Britain has a considerable number of fully computerised systems—something like 95 of the 96 MCCs have computer systems—but there are five different systems, they are aging and, due to a lack of standardisation in their design, they cannot easily support links between magistrates courts and other organisations in the criminal justice system. That is why we have proposed that there should be a new national standard information system service, which will provide information systems to support all MCCs in England and Wales and facilitate electronic linking and, hence, a speedier flow of information between magistrates courts and other organisations in the criminal justice system. By doing that, we will speed up the system of justice.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): The hon. Gentleman has rightly said that the Government are seeking to reduce delay and they have said that they will halve the time taken to bring what are often called fast-track cases to court, but have the Government yet identified the length of time that particular types of cases currently take to come to court so that we may know in future whether they have managed to halve it?

Mr. Hoon: I am surprised that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has not spent more time studying the Government's manifesto which sets out that the average time taken to bring a case before the courts is some four and a half months. We strongly believe that it is crucial that we reduce that average time.

Ms Christine Russell (City of Chester): For the 17 years before I arrived in this place I was a serving magistrate, and I believe that the office of justice of the peace is one of the oldest offices in the land, dating back to the 14th century. This afternoon, my hon. Friend has told us that 97 per cent. of all cases are dealt with in the magistrates court. Will my hon. Friend give us an assurance today that that will continue and that there is no intention to reduce the number of lay magistrates, replacing them with stipendiaries?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is right to say that I said that some 97 per cent. of all cases begin and end in the magistrates court. There are some 30,000 lay magistrates in Britain. In contrast, there are 90 stipendiary magistrates. Whether there should be additional stipendiary magistrates is clearly a matter for the particular MCC, which must seek the Lord Chancellor's approval before such a decision is taken. However, I can assure my hon. Friend that there is no current policy to replace those 30,000 volunteers, who provide their expertise generally free of charge to the system, with stipendiary magistrates.

Mr. John M. Taylor (Solihull): It is true that the Lord Chancellor cannot close a court on his own initiative, but he has the statutory power to merge MCC areas. As the Parliamentary Secretary has said, the number is now down from about 105 to 96. What is the hon. Gentleman's ultimate target? What would he like to get the figure down to?

While I am on my feet, I should like to say that I share the appreciation of magistrates, and I note with some satisfaction that Solihull will not amalgamate with Birmingham and Coventry.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for that question and for the hon. Gentleman's support, such as it was. The target was set out clearly in my statement; it is to achieve consistency with the police authority areas and the revised CPS areas, in order to ensure that we have a consistent administrative system for the courts throughout the country.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): I welcome my hon. Friend's support for continuing the system of lay magistrates and his view that the bench should represent all sections of the community. Does he accept, however, that such broad representation is not always the case? What plans does he have to encourage a wider cross-section of people to apply to become magistrates? Will he also consider having discussions with employers to make them more sympathetic to requests from their employees for time off to perform that vital public duty?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question. It is indeed important that as many people as possible apply for the important position of magistrate. Sadly, I suspect that too often the message is rather like light from a distant star, in that many people are deterred from applying because they believe that they will not be selected and approved. In many parts of the country, however, MCCs are crying out for suitable volunteers. We have encouraged those committees to place advertisements in newspapers to try to find as many people as possible who are willing to undertake those important responsibilities in our communities.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the Minister look at the economies of scale that may be appropriate in urban conurbations, but which have quite a different result in rural constituencies such as mine? There is already concern among magistrates in the small towns of Cullompton, Tiverton and Honiton in my constituency. In the Cullompton magistrates court, we already take the overspill from the city of Exeter. Will he ensure that the guidelines reflect the need for geographic spread, not least because police officers attached to local police stations will incur the loss of much greater parts of their day in travelling further distances?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Lady has very precisely expressed the importance of local decision making. Decisions taken in a rural area by a magistrates courts committee selected from that area will be different from decisions taken in a more urban area by the magistrates courts committee there, which is why it is so important that those decisions remain locally based. Committees in rural areas are able to reflect considerations and circumstances that are very different from those in more urban ones.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Rothwell): The logic of my hon. Friend's statement is that he will eventually be looking to form a West Yorkshire MCC. Will the current committee or a West Yorkshire committee decide on closures? Will he be giving any guidance to the committees that will be formed on the criteria that they should apply? I am concerned about the future of local

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courts. There are many local magistrates who do a good job who would be very reluctant to travel the distance to a larger court in a larger place.

Mr. Hoon: I hope that—after hearing the statement, which will be communicated to all magistrates courts committees—the reaction of areas that currently are not consistent with police authority areas and CPS areas will be to introduce proposals to achieve such consistency. I hope also that we can achieve many of the statement's objectives without resorting to the powers that are available in statute to the Lord Chancellor. If it is necessary, however, we will use the powers that are available under current law.

I hope that, as we use those powers, we will provide the consistency that will offer comfort not only to my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Gunnell) but to hon. Members from across the country.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The Minister is surely aware that, although decisions relating to closure of magistrates courts are taken locally, allocation of resources very often can have a very heavy influence on the decisions that are taken. Will he take it from me that, although the magistrates court in Macclesfield requires quite a lot of improvement—in fact, we require additional facilities—there is overwhelming support for the court to continue there? Does he appreciate the unique nature—as expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning)—of the problems facing many rural areas?

Mr. Hoon: I said in my statement that the Department is currently reviewing the grant allocation formula and that we intend to introduce a new formula for 1999-2000, which we believe will be better able to meet the needs while recognising performance and which will distribute available resources more fairly. It is clear that that must take account of the very different circumstances in rural areas as opposed to urban areas.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): Does my hon. Friend recognise that, given the importance of the changes he is introducing and the speed with which they are being introduced, there would be considerable merit in having a moratorium on closures, particularly because financial issues often drive the closure argument? Such a moratorium could remain in place until the funding has been reviewed and these important changes are brought about.

Does my hon. Friend recognise that efficiency must not simply be a transfer of costs from one Government body to another or from one Government body to other parts of society? Does he recognise that it may be less costly for magistrates but more expensive for the Crown Prosecution Service and the police? The Government need to see that the issues are addressed in the round and accept that judicial efficiency is not necessarily monetary efficiency.

Mr. Hoon: I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern, but I repeat that it is not for the Government or the Lord Chancellor's Department to announce a moratorium on court closures. The decision on closures is taken by the local magistrates courts committee. In judging appeals on these matters, it is important that we take account of the wider cost picture. My hon. Friend is right to say that it would be absurd if, in the interest of a short-term saving over a particular courthouse, the rest of the Government were faced with larger costs. I accept that point entirely.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): The hon. Gentleman will know—because I have told him—of the great anger in Ripon at the proposal to close Ripon magistrates court and to transfer its functions to Harrogate. That will be a blow to the regeneration of the city centre, it will make justice less accessible in a wide rural area and it represents a transfer of costs from the public to the private purse. When the appeal comes to the Lord Chancellor, will the hon. Gentleman ensure that it is examined in the context of the regeneration of Ripon and the rural area and ensure that a wide and careful scrutiny is made of the proposals put to him?

Mr. Hoon: The right hon. Gentleman has been assiduous in drawing the attention of the Lord Chancellor's Department to the court in his area. I suspect that he holds the record for the number of letters written about any court. I have no doubt that there will be plenty of Conservative Members, and possibly some Labour Members, who will want to emulate his activities. I can only repeat that when considering an appeal carefully, it is necessary to take into account a wide variety of factors. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we will take into account the factors that he has mentioned.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): My hon. Friend will know that, in the county palatine of Lancashire, certain matters affecting the magistracy, such as the appointment of magistrates, are dealt with by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and not the Lord Chancellor's Department. Are there any aspects in the issues that he has announced today that will require consultation by that Department at the same time as his own Department?

Mr. Hoon: Not that I am aware of.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Is the Minister aware of the deep disappointment in Bromsgrove at the decision to close our magistrates court? Can he confirm that when I took a delegation to see him, he told us that if my local district council was willing to offer a subsidy to keep the court open, he would consider the matter? Will he confirm that, like me, he has received no notification of that offer from Bromsgrove district council?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Lady has also been assiduous in making clear her concerns about Bromsgrove magistrates court, although she has not written quite as many letters as the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). I agree with her point willingly.

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): I welcome the Minister's statement about improved efficiency, but I want to return to the loss of rural courthouses, which has been raised by several other hon. Members. In my constituency, the rural courthouses were closed by the previous Government. They have already gone, so the conversion of Conservative Members to the cause that we have supported for some years can best be described, charitably, as welcome hypocrisy.

Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the major problems with the effectiveness and efficiency of the magistracy is the lack of volunteers and that it is the processes and procedures used that deter many people from coming forward? We have deeply unrepresentative benches with many members of the community and many groups being excluded. An open and accountable selection process would lead to more people volunteering and more confidence in the system and people would no longer feel that getting on the bench depended on what society or secret club one belonged to.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his observations. I dealt with a similar question a few minutes ago, and I repeat that sometimes the message takes a long time to get through. He has set out accurately the concerns of many people at the way in which magistrates are selected. I hope to reassure him that considerable efforts are being made to encourage applications to the magistracy and to ensure that the system is as open and transparent as it can be.

If my hon. Friend has any particular concerns, I should be grateful if he would write to me about them. I will pursue them vigorously.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Does the Minister recall meeting me a few weeks ago to discuss the proposed closure of the court in my constituency? He subsequently upheld that closure, leaving my constituency, which is 100 miles long from north to south, with one magistrates court. That is not access to justice.

May I also ask the hon. Gentleman why his statement did not contain a single word about access to justice and upholding the standard of justice?

Mr. Hoon: My recollection is that I referred consistently to access to justice, but if that is not the case I assure the hon. Member that running throughout the Government's proposals for reforming the legal system is a commitment to access to justice. It is vital that that remains the case.

The hon. Gentleman's constituents have access to other courts not necessarily within the boundaries of his constituency, so his point about there being just one courthouse in a particular constituency does not paint the entire picture. I repeat that questions about whether a particular court should remain open or be closed are determined primarily at the local level.

Mr. David Lock (Wyre Forest): Although I welcome my hon. Friend's statement, may I raise with him the position of justices chief executives who are also justices clerks? Does he agree that the administration of the courts that handle 31 out of 32 of all criminal justice cases should not be left to people who spend the majority of their day in court, but should be the responsibility of accessible and full-time administrators? That would ensure that justice is speedily done.

Mr. Hoon: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. The role of the justices chief executives, as head of the service, is essential in providing a clear line of command between the magistrates courts committee and its staff, and in directing the implementation of the MCC's plans and objectives. The justices clerk's role is as a legal adviser to the magistrates. Successful management requires a clearly delineated role for justices clerks and the justices chief executives. Dual appointments inevitably risk a degree of compromise in that matter, with consequential complaints about the lack of impartiality.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Thank you. We shall now move on.

NEW MEMBER

The following Member took and subscribed the Oath: John Randall Esq., for Uxbridge.

BILLS PRESENTED

SUPREME COURT (OFFICES)

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon, supported by Mr. Attorney-General, Mr. Peter Kilfoyle and Jane Kennedy, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to the qualification for appointment as, and tenure of office of, Permanent Secretary to the Lord Chancellor and Clerk of the Crown in Chancery: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 68].

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Mr. Secretary Straw, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Secretary Cook, Mr. Secretary Dewar, Secretary Marjorie Mowlam, Mr. Secretary Davies and Mr. George Howarth, presented a Bill to amend the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978 so as to alter the method used in Great Britain for electing Members of the European Parliament; to make other amendments of enactments relating to the election of Members of the European Parliament; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 69].

Hare Coursing

4.19 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make hare coursing illegal.

This is the fourth time I have attempted to bring in such a Bill. It may be unusual for a Member of Parliament to introduce a Bill in the fervent hope that it is rendered irrelevant by another Bill in the very near future, but that is what I am doing. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) has the enormous privilege of introducing on 28 November a Bill that seeks to enact one of the most popular measures any Back Bencher could possibly initiate, and I wish him well with it.

The purpose of my Bill is partly to counter the propaganda of blood sports aficionados over recent months, which has sought to give the impression that the Bill to abolish hunting with dogs is concerned almost solely with fox hunting. Foxes, they maintain, are vermin and, therefore, hunters are doing us a favour by pulling foxes to bits. Recent studies have shown that foxes spend much of their lives destroying vermin, but that is by the way.

Hunting with dogs also involves deer and hares. The hare is by no means vermin. It is a spectacularly beautiful and magical animal and it is already under stress as a species because of changes in agricultural practice. Animals have to be captured and transported cross country to provide the quarry for some hare coursing events—indeed, sometimes they are captured in and brought from Ireland for the purpose.

At Altcar in my constituency, the Waterloo cup is held every February, at which time many hares are breeding. West Lancashire has many reasons to be proud of itself, but the area is ashamed that it is forced to host the Waterloo cup. West Lancashire and Sefton councils have cross-party agreements to try to end the activity in their area, but a proposed West Lancashire byelaw was stifled by the last Government. I am hopeful that legislation will make it unnecessary for the council to go through that procedure again.

At most coursing events, hares are beaten out of long grass, one at a time, on to the course. When they pass the dog handler—the slipper—he releases two dogs, which compete to catch the hare before it reaches the longer grass at the far end of the course. Points are awarded for the dogs' success in turning the hare away from its escape. Of course, many hares are caught and pulled to pieces. The fact that hares escape is used as an excuse for the event, although the presence of illegal gangs in surrounding fields sometimes ensures that escaping hares run a second gauntlet. Unlike other forms of hunting, the dogs—normally greyhounds—are faster than the hare and they usually catch up with it fairly rapidly.

Legal hare coursing is linked to illegal hare coursing. Men with dogs frequent farm land in casual pursuit of hares. When farmers try to stop it, they are often threatened with dire consequences and farmers are known to shoot hares on their land so as to keep casual coursers away. In recent years in my constituency, hares have been torn to pieces next to a primary school, with the children watching horrified from the playground; and one small girl saw, twice in one day and from her own garden, hares killed by lurchers. It is impossible to stamp out those illegal horrors while organised events are sanctioned by the law and thereby afforded some moral licence.

Organised hare coursing is the last of the spectator blood sports. It belongs with bear baiting, bull baiting and cock fighting—all of which have been properly outlawed in this country for many years.

The spectacle of large numbers of city dwellers massed along the banking at Altcar, copiously supplied with booze and baying for blood, is a particularly unpleasant one. It is this spectator aspect of hare coursing that makes it the most loathsome of all blood sports.

The excuses made by blood sports fans are universally ridiculous. I have been told by a gentleman living in Manningtree in Essex, in one of many rather unpleasant letters that I have received—none of them from my constituents—that hares are a pursuit species—that is a new one! Apparently, they evolved to be chased. Furthermore, they are not traumatised by the chase. Clearly, this gentleman has psychoanalysed hares to discover that truth.

Coursing is excused also because of its long and distinguished history. It dates back, the same gentleman tells me, to pre-Roman times; and years ago kings and queens owned and ran coursing dogs—so that is all right then. Mr. Mark Prescott, who organises the Waterloo cup, speaks similarly—although rather more eloquently—about the history of the sport. Much the same sort of argument, of course, can be made about public beheading, drawing and quartering, a tradition espoused both by the Romans and by our past monarchs. Hare coursing is also excused because it is a celebration of the skills of the hare—the pursuit species—as well as of the skills of the hounds. Celebrating the skills of an animal escaping its human-designed torture seems perverse in the extreme.

Hare coursing is excused, too, because it is good for the hare population—even though in many areas hare numbers are in decline and hares are captured and transported to coursing areas where their numbers have collapsed. The hare population is now about 20 per cent. of what it was 100 years ago. The United Kingdom biodiversity steering group includes the brown hare in its list of species in decline or under threat.

In common with other blood sports, hare coursing is further excused by the claim that it is a country activity which is opposed only by city people. That is the most blatant absurdity of all blood sports apologias. The audience for the slaughter at the Waterloo cup gives the lie to this claim. Hunts generally are supported by urban dwellers, as more and more people move in and out of the countryside for their leisure activities.

The attempt to build up a false mystique of country life to excuse hunting with dogs is a huge deception.

Another excuse is that banning hare coursing, as with hunting with dogs generally, is an infringement of individual liberties. That argument does not bear a moment's examination. No doubt Dr. Crippen thought his liberties were being infringed when he was arrested for his activities.

The only argument for blood sports that carries any weight—not much, at that—concerns the role that they play in the local economy. The same argument is used in favour of the exporting of land mines. Few jobs are involved and they are usually temporary ones. There are many alternatives, certainly on managed estates. Bearing in mind the inevitability of legislation on this issue in the not-too-distant future, there is time for those involved to adjust their activities and to bring them more closely in keeping with what is acceptable to most British people.

Whatever the arguments for and against blood sports, I have one major underlying concern. One does not have to be a fervent animal lover to be deeply worried by the psychology of those who obtain pleasure from the killing of an animal and who increase that pleasure by setting one animal to kill another. Even more deeply disturbing is the psychology of those who gain their pleasure from simply watching this happen without even the excuse of participating themselves in the so-called thrill of the chase.

Hare coursing was the origin of greyhound and whippet racing, in which there is no intention to set out to kill an animal. These sports are enjoyed by millions of people with no lust for blood. They are where spectators of hare coursing can legitimately enjoy watching the progress of dogs.

There is no possible excuse for the continuation of the legality of hare coursing. I trust that during the lifetime of this Government the huge public revulsion at this activity will be reflected by Parliament banning it.

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. Peter Atkinson to oppose the motion.

4.28 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): It is proper that I declare an interest at this stage, in that I am a consultant for the British Field Sports Society, an organisation which represents not only coursing but hunting, shooting, fishing and falconry.

This Bill has become something of a hardy annual with the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall); he has brought it up about four times in recent years, and I believe that it is time to explode some of the myths that he has perpetuated about the ancient sport of coursing. The hon. Gentleman's correspondent from Manningtree is correct in saying that hare coursing is, with falconry, one of the oldest field sports in existence.

Make no mistake, Mr. Deputy Speaker: this is a question not simply of animal rights, but of individual rights. The hon. Member for West Lancashire said that it did not bear a moment's examination to suggest that he was proposing to take away the right of decision from individuals, but to me, that is the central issue in what he proposes. The matter should not be decided by law; people should be allowed to take part in that activity if they consider that it is right.

Defending individual freedom is what the House is about. We are in the Chamber because we have a duty to allow people to exercise their conscience on the matter and not to be dictated to.

People who follow coursing are annoyed by the ignorance of the sport on the part of the people who attack it. I give credit to the hon. Member for West Lancashire because I understand that he turned up at the Waterloo cup about two or three years ago. He spent about a quarter of an hour or 20 minutes there, during which time not a single hare was killed, but I commend him for having done so.

Opinion polls suggest that the majority of the people who are opposed to coursing—I accept that there are many—understand little of the sport. Some years ago, an exercise was put in hand assembling a focus group—now a common thing with the Labour party—to ask people what they thought about coursing. The majority of people, when asked, said that coursing was letting a captive hare out of a box in an enclosed field and chasing it around the enclosed field with two greyhounds; the greyhound that killed it was the winner. Every one of those points is untrue. If that was the sport of coursing, I certainly should not be here defending it. Coursing is not about that.

Hon. Members are equally guilty of such ignorance. A Labour Member who introduced a similar Bill to the one before us appeared on a "Newsnight" programme. Mr. Paxman showed him two photographs, one of a rabbit and one of a hare. He was asked which was the hare and which was the rabbit, and he admitted that he could not tell. The previous time that a similar Bill was sent to a Standing Committee of the House, a Labour Member suggested that a course lasted for 40 minutes, whereas the average length of a course is 35 seconds.

I would spare the blushes of those Members, but it is wrong that Labour Members, especially, condemn the activities of perfectly reasonable individuals without knowing anything about those activities. Indeed, it is an abuse of Parliament to do so.

Hare coursing is about the pursuit of wild hares that are not restrained or interfered with. The object of coursing is to test the stamina, skill and ability of two greyhounds, not to kill hares, which is why very few hares are killed. In the last season—records are kept by the National Coursing Club—245 hares were killed during 89 days of coursing. On the other hand, it is possible to run a successful coursing meeting—such as the one that the hon. Member for West Lancashire will have seen at Altcar—only if there is a large population of wild, healthy hares in that area, so strict conservation methods must be introduced to ensure that the local hare population prospers. That is why, on coursing estates throughout the country and on the farms where the clubs run, the hare population is far higher than average.

The hon. Member for West Lancashire is right to say that the hare population has declined. It declined until about 20 years ago, although it is stable now. However, that was the result of changing farming practices and the fact that farmers now make silage, not the traditional hay. The decline is not, however, in the areas where coursing clubs look after the hares.

If he went to Altcar, the hon. Member for West Lancashire would see the conservation effort that is made by gamekeepers to protect the hares from predators such as foxes, and from human predators such as poachers. We share the hon. Gentleman's disapproval of illegal coursing, which is merely poaching. Even if the Bill became law, there would be no guarantee that those individuals would take any more notice of it than they take of the law of the land now. The only way to deal with those people is to arrest and prosecute them, and confiscate their vehicles.

If the Bill succeeds, the hare population on coursing estates will decline, as it has in other parts of the country. The hon. Gentleman may save 245 hares, but, ultimately, we would see the decline of many thousands of hares on

[Mr. Peter Atkinson]

that field. The Bill is a bad bargain for hares and the hon. Gentleman should understand some of the paradoxes involved in the conservation of wild species.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the crowd. Curiously, last year he was rather rude about the crowd on what is known as the "public bank" at Altcar. Last year, I asked somebody from the British Field Sports Society to carry out a survey to find out who was sitting on the bank, and the news for the hon. Gentleman is that most of them were his constituents. Naturally, they are from the area and, traditionally, over many years, they have come to watch the Waterloo cup, so many of the people whom the hon. Gentleman described as beer-loaded lager louts are his constituents. Some have come from further afield: some are miners or factory workers; others are unemployed. There is no reason why they should not enjoy a traditional sport, as they always have.

Three proper substantial investigations have been carried out into coursing since the war, and all three have found in its favour. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the last, which was carried out by a House of Lords Special Select Committee set up in 1976 at the behest of a Labour Government.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): It was not.

Mr. Atkinson: If the hon. Gentleman will listen, that Special Select Committee concluded—

Mr. McNamara: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Atkinson: No, I will not give way because I have only a short time to speak—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) has been here long enough to know that we are operating under the 10-minute rule. If the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) does not wish to give way, he does not have to give way.

Mr. Atkinson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. McNamara: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman to mislead the House by saying that a Labour Government established that Committee? They did not do so. It was established by a Tory majority in the House of Lords after my Bill, supported by the Government, had successfully gone through this House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a point for debate, which, if necessary, can be corrected in some other way.

Mr. Atkinson: I said that the Committee was set up under a Labour Government—it was 1976, which I recall was the time of a Labour Government. It is important not to argue about that but to understand the conclusions of the House of Lords Special Select Committee that

> "the Committee have concluded that the Bill is not a suitable instrument for reducing the suffering of hares. . . The ethical question should in their opinion be for the individual conscience and not for legislation."

That is the position that this House should hold for today.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Colin Pickthall, Mr. David Amess, Mrs. Jackie Ballard, Mr. Stephen Day, Mr. Neil Gerrard, Mr. Mike Hall, Mr. John Heppell, Mr. Eddie O'Hara, Mr. Gordon Prentice, Mr. Kevin McNamara, Mr. Alan Meale and Angela Smith.

HARE COURSING

Mr. Colin Pickthall accordingly presented a Bill to make hare coursing illegal: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 November, and to be printed [Bill 70].

Wireless Telegraphy Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

4.38 pm

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is a short Bill, but it is of central importance for growth, competitiveness, innovation and jobs, and for maintaining the United Kingdom's position at the leading edge of the information revolution. It deals with the management of the radio spectrum. While that may sound a narrow, perhaps rather technical, matter, the provisions are crucial for ensuring the continued success of some of the most dynamic sectors of our economy, including radio, telephony, broadcasting and information technology.

Those technologies are not only growing rapidly, but converging at an increasing rate. What they all have in common is that they use the radio spectrum as a medium for the transmission of information. The Bill deals with the provision of that rare resource, the radio spectrum, on which the communications and information revolution so crucially depends.

The measure will allow the Government to charge for the right to use certain waves by mobile phone, pager, cab or other radio-based services, particularly in congested areas such as cities and the main communication corridors. Frequencies offered would be leased. The aim is to use commercial pricing as a means to effective spectrum price management.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Given that the Minister could make more spectrum available without tax increases, can he tell the House how there can be more jobs if he takes £1,500 million of much needed money out of the industry? Will he come clean and agree that that means fewer jobs, fewer opportunities, and damage to the industry?

Mr. Battle: I am amazed at such an early intervention from the right hon. Gentleman. I remind him that his party proposed the measure to give a boost to this sector of the economy, as I shall spell out in detail. No, we do not see it as a tax measure. We see it as a means of opening space on the spectrum. That has been widely welcomed by the industry, as was clear from the consultation. As right hon. and hon. Members will be aware, the Bill started life in another place, where it was well received and constructively debated. I should like to think that that approach will be taken this afternoon.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): Although we well understand that the intention of the Bill is better management of the radio spectrum, and that auctioning access to the spectrum is part of that process, there is a fear in the House that the Bill may become a tax-raising measure. It sets out the objectives to which the Minister must have regard, but it is not exclusive. It would be helpful if he could give the House some guarantee that it is entirely a matter of management, not a measure for raising taxes through whatever process may follow.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Before the Minister resumes, may I say that, when hon. Members are seeking to interrupt the Minister at the Dispatch Box, it would be helpful if they would identify the fact that they are trying to interrupt, rather than standing like statues. It would equally be helpful if the Minister would indicate to which of several hon. Members he is giving way.

Mr. Battle: With so many interventions after one sentence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is hard to keep pace.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) can have the assurance he seeks. The purpose of the Bill is to break open the spectrum, to manage it better and to ensure that it can be used at all in the future. That is why many companies have welcomed the Bill. It is worth pointing out that the majority of users will face no increases, and will even pay less under the Bill. That is often not made sufficiently clear.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): With reference to clause 1 and my hon. Friend's last remarks, will he confirm that clause 1 does not refer to the use of radio equipment on United Kingdom-registered fishing vessels?

Mr. Battle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that detailed point. Fishing vessels will come within the scope of the Bill, but it will not have an impact on the planned charges. The frequencies for maritime use and the standards for equipment and services used were determined internationally, so they will not be directly affected as my hon. Friend fears.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): Is the Minister aware that the previous Government stated that they had no plans to introduce spectrum pricing to the 3.5 and 10 GHz bands used for fixed radio access by Ionica and other companies? As much of the equipment for fixed radio access is made in Nortel in my constituency, I am concerned about the policy of the previous Government, which was enlightened and well accepted by the work force of 800 at Nortel. Will the Minister confirm that the new Government will accept the principles established by the previous Administration in this field?

Mr. Battle: After lots of consultation, we have come to that view. In fact, Ionica welcomed the legislation when it was introduced. As I have said, we have accepted amendments that were made in the other place. Several amendments to the Bill reflect the comments and concerns expressed by the noble Lords, not least on behalf of some of the companies, particularly Orange. The Bill also takes account of the views expressed by a wide range of radio users in the course of extensive consultation by the Radiocommunications Agency.

I shall explain later the changes that we have made to the Bill, which have reinforced, and in no way undermined, the thrust of the legislation. I attach great importance to consultation and dialogue with those affected by the Bill regarding all the measures that my Department may bring forward. In order to emphasise our commitment to consultation, the Bill now provides specifically for statutory consultation on draft regulations.

It is tempting to say that the legislation has emerged from a series of consultations, including "The Future Management of the Radio Spectrum", published in March

[Mr. Battle]

1994; the White Paper entitled "Spectrum Management: into the 21st Century", published in June 1996—both endeavours of the previous Government—and "Implementing Spectrum Pricing", which was released within weeks of Labour's coming to office in May 1997. We intend to maintain wide-ranging, informed consultation with those affected by this measure, and later I shall announce new arrangements to take the process further forward and give users an even stronger voice in this vital area.

Radio has proved to be one of the key technologies of the 20th century. It is perhaps an appropriate time to introduce a Bill that will dramatically modernise the management of the radio spectrum, as this year marks the centenary of the establishment of the first stations in this country for wireless telegraphy. The first legislation regulating radio, the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1904, was put in place more than 90 years ago. The legal framework was updated through the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949, but it remains essentially unchanged.

The world has changed rather dramatically since then, and radio has played a key part in many of those changes. Back in 1949, radio was used essentially for one purpose: sound broadcasting. There were then just three radio stations. Of course, radio was also used for some maritime communications—as my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman) emphasised—and for radio astronomy, which was then in its infancy.

Developments in the use of the radio spectrum over the past 50 years have been astonishing. In broadcasting, we have seen the enormous growth of radio and television, which rely equally on the radio spectrum. As an illustration of this, the Radio Authority recently awarded its 200th licence for a local commercial station.

It is important to add that radio is no longer just about broadcasting. An enormous range of businesses now depend crucially on the radio spectrum—from the giants of telecommunications and computing to small businesses, such as taxi firms, which are crucially dependent on radio for their day-to-day operations. In future, we can expect the boundaries between radio, telephony and computing to become increasingly blurred, allowing, for example, portable computers to communicate more quickly and to convey greater quantities of information. Multimedia convergence is the brave new world facing us as we approach the new century.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am following the Minister's historical reflections with the closest possible interest, but I return us to the present for a moment. Can he tell the House how much the Bill will cost the public sector? Health and emergency services, for example, are extremely reliant upon radio systems—as I hope the Minister is well aware. What action do the Government propose to take to ensure that those vital services have the access to the airwaves that they undoubtedly need?

Mr. Battle: It is important to emphasise that the concessions for services that use the radio spectrum for emergencies will remain. That was made absolutely clear in the debate in the other place. The whole purpose of the Bill is spectrum management. The public sector will have similar incentives for spectrum management efficiency. In other words, the Ministry of Defence will have to pay a comparable amount, but the pricing for emergency services will be considered in the light of the consultation. The aim is not to price people out but to price them in, to use the spectrum more effectively, to open up space. That is the whole point, intent and purpose of the Bill.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I apologise for stopping the Minister from getting into his full flow, but many people are interested in the Bill. For several years before the last general election, my local fishermen were very upset that pleasure craft users, who effectively use the same radio licence as fishermen, were getting it very much cheaper. The fishermen felt that it would be better if pricing was more even.

I know that the Bill contains powers to make variation. The Conservative Government said that they were about to decide which way it should go, and I have a letter written in April—just before the hon. Gentleman took over. Has his Department made a determination about fairer fees between fishermen and pleasure craft owners, who in effect are using the same licence?

Mr. Battle: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. We do not see the correspondence of the previous Administration, as he well knows, but I shall be happy to take his point further. His point has been taken on board. The aim is to have fair use of the spectrum as well as ensuring that more of it is used, because—as I think he hints—demand for services will increase. Radio is likely to remain the indispensable means of providing multimedia convergence and mobility. In other words, the radio spectrum, as the raw material of the information revolution, will be vital.

Nor is the question one of marginal, purely technological concern. I want to emphasise—the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) raised this point with me—the importance of radio to the economy. In 1995-96, radio contributed £13 billion to gross domestic product, and more than 400,000 jobs were created. The contribution to GDP is growing at a rate of £1 billion a year, and jobs are being created in these industries at the rate of 1,000 a week. Radio also provides some £12 billion to £15 billion a year of efficiency gains and other user benefits, as businesses now rely on radio to facilitate their communications in a whole host of new ways, so it benefits the economy.

The whole purpose of the Bill—to open up the use of the spectrum—is to create space for that sector of the economy to grow. It is certain that pressures on the radio spectrum will increase as society demands ever greater mobility and as new services continue to become available, because demand in Britain for the radio spectrum is starting to outstrip its availability. That is the key point, and it is particularly true in the major conurbations and in the corridors between them where radio use is most concentrated.

In other words, we need to act now for the benefit of all radio users, private and business. I am tempted to say that, if we do not open up the space, we will not be able to use it at all, because it will be too congested, and we will all fail. That is the whole point of introducing the Bill at this time.

If we fail to do that, the result will be increased spectrum prices and congestion. Businesses will be denied access to the radio services on which they now depend.

Introducing new technologies will be delayed, and the cost to the economy will be incalculable, because businesses will grind to a halt. They will not be able to improve, because they will not have the space to take advantage of new technologies to move further forward. The cost to the economy could be billions of pounds a year, and thousands of jobs could go, or at least be jeopardised, if we do not open up the space now.

The legislative framework for managing the radio spectrum was designed for an era when spectrum availability was not a problem. Up to now, it has served us relatively well, but it does not provide us with the tools we need to manage the spectrum effectively to provide the basis for continued growth and innovation. That is the purpose of the Bill—to update the spectrum management framework, set up in the early 20th century, to take us forward to meet the challenges of the 21st.

Under current legislation, the radio spectrum is managed by regulation, and licence fees have to be based on the administrative costs of the Radiocommunications Agency in carrying out its licensing and spectrum management functions in respect of each licence class. That has two perverse effects.

First, because licence fees are not priced according to the value of the spectrum used, demand becomes distorted. Users do not have an incentive to use the spectrum more efficiently, for example by investing in more spectrum-efficient equipment, and may also be tempted to hang on to spectrum that they are not currently in a position to use to the full—or in some instances to use at all—because the cost to them of using it is minimal. In other words, the present system generates an attitude of hoarding spectrum space.

Secondly, as a consequence of the cost-recovery principle, the fee structure discriminates heavily against small businesses, because their fees are much higher in terms of the amount of radio spectrum they use. For example, small businesses such as taxi firms or couriers pay on average 30 times more than one of the large telecommunications operators for the same amount of spectrum. I think that we would all agree that that is obviously unfair.

The Bill will bring about a radical change in the way in which the spectrum is managed. It will enable—indeed, require—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, when setting fees, to take account of a range of criteria connected with the efficient management of the spectrum, rather than, as at present, simply applying administrative costs.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): If existing users of spectrum do not have to pay a fee, and if new users will have to bid in an auction and pay a fee to use the spectrum, how will that encourage new entrants?

Mr. Battle: Existing services will not be subject to an auction. There are no plans to subject current users to auctions for existing arrangements. Auctions will apply to the new space that is opened up. We envisage auctions being used on rare occasions, when there are many intensive bids for the same amount of space. I shall say a little more about the detail of auctions, but I do not see everyone rushing down the auction route. That is not the intention or purpose behind the Bill.

Before outlining the main provisions of the Bill, I should explain that it contains enabling powers. The detailed implementation of these powers in relation to licence fees and auctions will be through regulations. That will provide the flexibility that is essential to respond to the pace of change in this sector. If we set the rules now and hope that they will last for another 100 years, we shall be caught out by the changing pace of technology and its converging world.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the Minister, because he has been generous in giving way.

Has the Minister made any estimate of the likely proceeds that will be realised as a consequence of the Bill? Will he share with the House any estimate that has been made? Is it a matter that he has discussed with the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Mr. Battle: Much depends, of course, on decisions that are taken on auctions, and I shall spell out later the decisions that are involved. About £500 million to £1.5 billion could be raised over many years. That will not happen overnight, because the process will be phased. Surely that is the proper way in which to proceed. Some revenue will be generated, and we should not apologise for that. I shall return later to the detail.

The intention behind the Bill is to open up space. What will happen if we do nothing? The answer is that cities and main corridors will be left clogged, so that no one can use them. What is the option apart from shutting down the economy? That is not a sensible way in which to proceed.

There will be licensing, and in terms of spectrum space, we have a right to look after taxpayers' interests and to say that they should have a revenue take. The main purpose is to manage the spectrum well. If we do not prise it open, nothing will happen. Indeed, things will get worse.

Clause 1 contains a general power to allow the Secretary of State to set fees by regulations. The clause will replace regulation-making powers as set out in section 2 of the 1949 Act.

Clause 2 is the core of the Bill. In particular, clause 2(1) breaks the link between the fees under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 and the Radiocommunications Agency's administrative costs. That will allow the Secretary of State, if she thinks fit, to set fees higher than those set on the basis of cost recovery.

Concerns have been expressed in the other place and by industry that higher fees could, in effect, become a form of taxation, but those fears are unfounded. I am sad that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) has left the Chamber, because I would like to spell out why, as my right hon. Friend recognises, it would be counter-productive to impose unnecessarily high fees on a sector that contributes enormously to the growth of the national economy.

I stress that the clause contains important provisions that will constrain the level of fees charged by my right hon. Friend or any of her successors. There is a built-in break clause. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that, if he reads clause 2(1), he will find an answer to his question.

The clause requires that, in setting fees, the Secretary of State shall have regard to the matters specified in subsection (2). In setting fees, the Secretary of State must take account of the extent to which the required fee level will promote the efficient use of the electro-magnetic

[Mr. Battle]

spectrum, the economic benefits arising from the use of radio, and the development of innovative services and competition in the provision of telecommunication services.

If charges are increased from current levels, it will be because such charges are necessary to balance supply and demand in support of the objectives set out in clause 2. I cannot emphasise enough that the purpose of the Bill is to optimise the use of radio spectrum.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): I hope that the Minister was not inadvertently misleading the House when he read out subsection (1), because he missed out the two words "in particular". Given the amendment that was carried in the other place, which I hope he will accept, he will have to concede that the Secretary of State can have regard to matters other than those referred to in subsection (2), so he can increase the charges for other purposes that are not listed in the Bill. Is that not the position?

Mr. Battle: Of course that is the position, but, as I said, it would not be sane to price out the very sector that contributes massively to the growth of the national economy. That is not the purpose and intent of the Bill. It is unbelievable for Conservative Members to say that they are against it because it may lead to revenue for the Government.

I shall put the issue into a different context. Article 11 of the European telecommunications licensing directive, which was adopted by the previous Government on 10 April and which all member states must implement, deals with fees and charges for individual licences. The directive recognises that, where scarce resources, such as the radio spectrum, are to be used, member states should be allowed to impose charges that go beyond cost recovery, to reflect the need to ensure the optimal use of those resources. The proposals in the Bill are fully in line with that directive, which underpins the safeguards in clause 2.

If the Bill becomes law, it is proposed to introduce new fees by regulation next year. We want the implementation of spectrum pricing to take full account of the views of radio users. We attach great importance to consultation. It has happened before, and we have continued that process in good faith so that industry can be fully prepared for the likely changes that will be required and so that the new fee proposals, which will ultimately be contained in regulations, take full account of the views of users. I do not know what more we can practically do.

That is why, on 29 May, the Radiocommunications Agency issued a consultation document called "Implementing Spectrum Pricing", which set out in some detail how it is proposed to implement the new approach. The proposals in that document represent the culmination of a great deal of on-going discussion with the industry, and in particular the results of the consultations that took place under the previous Government. Consultation is a sensible way to take this debate and these policies forward, so that the proposal is practical and breaks open the spectrum without pricing people out. The idea is to price people in.

Mr. Fallon: Is it or is it not the case that, under clause 2, revenue could be raised through extra charges for matters that are not specified in the clause?

Mr. Battle: Yes, but we felt that the range set out for the more efficient use of the spectrum, and enabling innovation to be considered, was not wide enough to ensure that we allowed for the possibilities of the future.

The hon. Gentleman may not realise that, given the current merger of telecommunications services, we need some space so that we can try to anticipate the shape of the future in an incredibly dynamic area. I accept that I shall never convince the hon. Gentleman; he believes that this is purely a tax measure, he will stick to that view, and will presumably oppose the measure. I challenge him, however, to say in opposing it what he would do instead. If we do not break open that space, there will be a massively damaging effect on business.

Mr. Prior: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Battle: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, but I shall do so again, for the last time.

Mr. Prior: I want to return to the question that I asked earlier, about the effect of the legislation on new entrants to the industry. It is all very well for those with existing spectrum, who are paying no fees—I can see why they would support the Bill—but what about new entrants?

Mr. Battle: The whole point of the Bill is to support existing entrants. If we can prise open the spectrum, new entrants will be able to go into it without any problem. I do not see how, when we are changing the fee structure across the board, there is any differentiation to be made. There would be if there were auctions, but I have the impression from what the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends have said that they believe that the purpose of the legislation is not spectrum management, but the introduction of a tax measure.

Mr. Fallon: It is both.

Mr. Battle: The hon. Gentleman presses me, but even the amendment to which he referred stated that any other reasons taken into account by my right hon. Friend would have to have reference and be related to spectrum management objectives. Clause 2 is not a clause under which revenue can be raised for anything; the point is to link it directly to the spectrum management objectives.

As for the specific proposals, as I have explained, the agency will take fully into account the comments that were made on the consultation document, and the revised proposals will take account of comments made then, and here, during this debate. Under the revised proposals, higher charges will be focused on the services and geographical areas where the spectrum is under most pressure, and where there is a spectrum management need to use the spectrum pricing tool. We estimate that most licensees will pay no more than they do now, and may pay up to 50 per cent. less. This is good news, not the bad news that Conservative Members seem to want to make it out to be.

"Safety of life" charities such as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and St. John Ambulance benefit from concessionary licence fees now. I emphasise—because some concern has been expressed—that those arrangements will continue under the new powers.

The other main plank of the Bill is the provision in clause 3 for licences to be auctioned. Hon. Members have raised the question of auctioning. We see auctions as a new tool. We do not intend them to be introduced across the board—that would be impractical—but there may be circumstances in which, in relation to a particular service, there will be more competing service providers than can be licensed. In such circumstances, the Secretary of State will have to choose who can be given a licence.

We believe that, in such circumstances, auctions have the real attractions of speed and transparency. They represent a more objective means of licensing than the alternative of what could be described as a beauty contest, which would require the Secretary of State or another person to choose between competing providers on the basis of criteria that would inevitably involve an element of subjective judgment. Although I would not rule that out in all conceivable circumstances, it is proving increasingly complex and contentious as the number of players in the industry continues to grow. An auction, however, would provide an objective basis for selection and ensure the selection of people who attach the highest value to the spectrum and are likely to use it to generate the greatest economic benefit.

In addition, auctions offer the possibility of substantial benefits to the Exchequer. As I have spelt out, income maximisation is not the reason for that approach, but I have no problem at all with the idea that the taxpayer should benefit from the provision to industry of this valuable resource.

I have referred to the consultation last year by the agency. Although that revealed fairly widespread support for spectrum pricing, concerns were expressed about the widespread use of auctions. Many of the same concerns have been expressed subsequently by industry and in another place. All I can do is repeat our assurances about how we propose to use the powers in clause 3.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): In the context of an auction, what does the Minister foresee might be added under clause 3(3)(e), which says that the Secretary of State may, in relation to the issue of such a licence,

"specify matters to be taken into account by the Secretary of State"?

How will those additional matters that are specified be taken into account in the context of an auction?

Mr. Battle: Again, we do not intend to require the many small and medium businesses that use radio through, for example, self-provided systems to start competing in auctions, because that approach would be neither practical nor desirable, given the number of businesses involved. Nor do we propose to require existing licensees to enter an auction for the right to continue to provide their services within their existing spectrum allocation. I know that the four main mobile telecommunications operators have expressed concern—

Mr. Fallon: Concern?

Mr. Battle: Yes, but we do not intend to require a mass auction. That is part of the mythology. Having said that, even the major telecommunications operators have welcomed the Bill and accept it.

We are happy to discuss the detail, including the comments by the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), in Committee—if he still feels that there is a problem in relation to third generation—to find out how we can come to a compromise and ensure that the Bill passes into law, so that the spectrum is managed properly and beneficially. As I have emphasised, if we do not do it now, we will hold back economic and business development.

We do not intend to require broadcasters who have already entered into an auction for the right to provide their service under the provisions of the Broadcasting Act 1990, to enter another auction to have continued access to the radio spectrum they need. I accept that that would be double jeopardy.

Mr. Lansley: I fear that I have to return to the point that I put to the Minister, because I do not think that he has answered it. Clause 3 seems to foresee that, even in relation to an auction, there will be circumstances in which matters other than the bid made under the prescribed procedure will be the basis on which a licence is issued. That is not about simply specifying requirements in advance. Something other than the greatest bid may be taken—for example, because of the investment that will be put into efficient spectrum use—but what is the Minister's intention in presenting the Bill in this form?

Mr. Battle: Consultation continues on auctioning, but we envisage that the auctions will most likely be used for new national or regional services, where there are more competing players than can be realistically accommodated in the spectrum and where selection is therefore necessary.

It is likely—although the Government have not taken a decision on this—that the first auction will be for licences for the so-called third generation mobile telephony, also known as the universal mobile telecommunications service. That service uses terrestrial and satellite telephone links. As I am sure the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) knows, it combines mobile telephony systems with flexible features such as the possibility of high-speed access to many information and entertainment services.

In July, the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry issued a consultation document called "Multimedia Communications on the Move". That explained that, although the first UMTS services are unlikely to come on stream until about 2000, we accept that there is a case for much earlier licensing certainty—the industry has asked for stability and certainty so that it knows where it is—in view of the scale of investment needed by service providers.

[Mr. Battle]

The closing date for comments on "Multimedia Communications on the Move" was the middle of this month. As I have said all along in the debate, we will take account of the comments in deciding the next steps, but there is a clear case for assigning UMTS licences by auction. I hope that the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire could envisage such a situation. The aim is not to move to mass auctions for everyone else. A mythology has built up around the Bill.

Clause 4 is designed to give enhanced security of tenure to licence holders. It enables the Secretary of State to include in a licence terms restricting her power to revoke or to vary the licence. At present, a Wireless Telegraphy Act licence may, in most cases, be revoked or varied at any time by the Secretary of State. That would normally be done only where the licensee had conspicuously failed to respect the terms of the licence.

In practice, it is rare for the Secretary of State to revoke or to vary a licence other than at the request of the licensee. Where there is a need to move a licensee to a different frequency, for spectrum management reasons, the approach of the Radiocommunications Agency is to do that over time, in consultation with the licensee.

We accept, however, that different considerations are likely to apply where licences for a considerable number of years may be auctioned and licensees may need to undertake large investment. We accept that, in those circumstances, licensees will want a firmer, legally binding guarantee that they will have security of tenure and that their licence will not be unexpectedly revoked by the Secretary of State.

That is why the power in clause 4 will enable the Secretary of State to include conditions that will give licensees the certainty that their licences will not be revoked, except in the exceptional circumstances set out in subsection (5)—for purposes of national security, or to enable the United Kingdom to comply with European Community obligations, international agreements or the like.

Clause 5 will allow the Secretary of State to undertake expenditure in support of the objective of efficient spectrum management. Although the Bill's main purpose, as I have repeatedly emphasised, is to use spectrum pricing as a tool for more efficient spectrum management, it will also produce increased revenues for the Government. There is certainly no question of hypothecation of those revenues.

However, the clause gives the Secretary of State the power to make grants to persons where, in her opinion, that is likely to support the objective of better spectrum management. The whole point is that the power of the Secretary of State is to back up better spectrum management.

There are ways in which the power could be used. For example, it could take the form of support of research into more spectrally efficient technologies. It might also be used to support courses provided by universities for the training of radio engineers in spectrally efficient techniques. Any expenditure that is proposed under that power would have to satisfy normal public expenditure and value-for-money criteria.

Clause 6 deals with the power to make regulations. As I have explained, both licence fees and proposals in relation to auctions will be set out in regulations. Under subsection 6(2), which we introduced in another place to respond to concerns about the need for consultation on regulations made under the powers in the Bill, the Secretary of State will be obliged to publish a notice, in the London, Edinburgh and Belfast Gazettes, setting out the gist of any regulations made under the power, specifying an address from which copies of the proposed regulations may be obtained, and setting a time limit of at least 28 days during which representations may be made. There is also an obligation on the Secretary of State to consider any representations that are made to her within that time.

We have introduced this provision in response to concerns. However, I emphasise that we see it as supplementary to, and in no way a substitute for, the non-statutory consultation to which we are fully committed. *[Interruption.]* We are going wider by saying, "Let us open the doors and work together to get this right."

The DTI and the Radiocommunications Agency have consulted extensively about proposals in this area. I have referred to recently published consultation documents on administrative pricing and on the licensing of the universal mobile telecommunications service. That consultation on specific proposals will continue. The new power simply provides a statutory guarantee that there must be a final phase of consultation before regulations are made. That is because consultation and partnership are at the heart of our approach to the development of industrial policy.

We recognise that there are enormous resources of knowledge, expertise and experience in the radio industry. It is to everyone's advantage that we draw upon them in getting the Bill right. Therefore, I am pleased to announce the establishment of a high-level spectrum management advisory group which will be drawn from radio users. The group's purpose will be to provide independent impartial advice directly to Ministers on a broad range of issues that will affect this fast-developing industry.

In particular, the group's role will be to advise on the Radiocommunications Agency's spectrum strategy, on major national allocation decisions, on the application of spectrum pricing, and on the policy objectives to be pursued in the relevant international arena. That will benefit industry and users of the radio spectrum, by bringing an informed industry perspective into the heart of our policy-making process. I shall lay the group's full terms of reference in the Library of both Houses. Appointments to the committee will be made by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry.

The decision to set up the spectrum management advisory group, together with the Bill's provisions and the agency's commitment to consultation, should demonstrate beyond any doubt our total commitment to ensuring that the interests of users are placed at the heart of policy making in this area. In the light of their interventions, I ask Opposition Members simply to ask themselves what will happen if they oppose the Bill and we do nothing. That will effectively clog up the whole system and damage the development of industry and business into the next century.

This short but important Bill provides a balanced package of spectrum management tools to ensure the optimum development of the radio spectrum to the benefit of business, consumers and our economy as a whole. It will not only ensure the continued prosperity of our most successful world-leading telecommunication industries but provide the necessary headroom for the development of those industries into the 21st century. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.22 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): "Good news," says the Minister, "A tax increase." "Good news," says the Minister, "The 18th tax increase from new Labour, and the money will not go back to the successful industry that pays it—it will go somewhere else." He says, "This will be the first £1,500 million tax raid in history that has created jobs rather than destroyed them in the industry that will have to pay the bill."

I pay tribute to the Minister for accepting my interventions and those of my hon. Friends and for his patience. However, it would have been better if he had been able to answer our powerful interventions. We asked how the details of the legislation would work, but he was unable to tell us. We asked for reassurances on sensitive services and important businesses in various constituencies, but again there were no satisfactory reassurances.

Mr. Battle: I am absolutely clear that we gave assurances on essential services, but perhaps the right hon. Gentleman missed them. He supported the measure when he was in government. Does he now intend to oppose it and jeopardise business as a result?

Mr. Redwood: We shall oppose it, but we shall not jeopardise business because I shall shortly reveal to the Minister how to handle the matter much better. In his two-part intervention he mentioned emergency services, but they are not in the Bill. Will he put them in the Bill?

The Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry (Mrs. Barbara Roche) *rose—*

Mr. Redwood: I will finish the point and perhaps the Minister who raised the issue will clarify it. Will he reassure the House that there will be no adverse cost consequences for the health service, for instance, as a result of the increased charges under the legislation? The Minister does not respond, so the point is made and my right hon. and hon. Friends will draw their own conclusions.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Is it correct that the right hon. Gentleman supported these proposals or similar ones when he was in government? If so, does he propose to explain what led to his change of heart?

Mr. Redwood: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has walked straight into an elephant trap. As he knows, the legislation has a chequered history. Officials in the Department tried to persuade me of its merits some years ago when I was Minister with responsibility for telecommunications. I am sure that Labour Members will be disappointed to hear that I turned it down. I refused to recommend it and continued my opposition to it from then until the present day.

Mrs. Roche *rose—*

Mr. Redwood: I give way to the impatient Minister.

Mrs. Roche: I assure the right hon. Gentleman and the House that I am not impatient but courteous and always willing to put the right hon. Gentleman out of his misery. Plainly, the attitude of Conservative Members is not just a turnaround from when they were in government. Let us look at what they said in opposition. When the Bill was introduced in the other place, their shadow Minister, Lord Inglewood, said:

> "I should begin by telling the House that we support the principle of the Bill"

and:

> "I conclude by reiterating our support for the approach that the Government are adopting. Although we shall obviously be looking at the Bill with a critical eye, we shall be doing so with a view to being constructive, not destructive."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 5 June 1997; Vol. 580 , c.727-30.]

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would like to take a lesson from his noble Friend.

Mr. Redwood: That was also a poor point. Of course we support the principle of better spectrum management, but we are unhappy about many of the powers and details in the legislation. My hon. Friends and I will demonstrate that in the debate and in Committee.

Officials tried the legislation on my successors after I ceased to have responsibility for telecommunications, but most of them also turned it down. Towards the end of the Conservative period in office the then Secretary of State came round to the Bill's principle, but even he did not think it sufficiently important to put it in his legislative programme nor did he ever put a figure as big as £1,500 million on the amount to be taken from the pockets of a successful industry. How wise he was.

We strongly object to the wide-ranging powers in this draft of the legislation to tax-raid people without proper recourse to Parliament for primary legislation. At least the Chancellor's 17 tax rises were in the Finance Bill and were debated, up to a point, in the House and in Committee. The idea behind this Bill is to give to Ministers, through statutory instruments and secondary legislation, enormously wide-ranging powers to tax-raid the honeypot of a successful industry that was created by the policies that Conservatives put into practice in the 1980s and 1990s by breaking the monopolies and opening up to innovation a most important industrial sector.

Mrs. Roche: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way to me for a second time. I am perplexed by what he says. He clearly states that he supports the principle of spectrum management and efficiency but not the Bill. Can he explain why in a debate in July on the Information Society initiative the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) said:

> "Opposition and Government can sometimes find common ground and I warmly support what the Minister is doing with regard to that Bill."—[*Official Report*, 11 July 1997; Vol. 297, c. 1203.]

[Mrs. Roche]

That comment was about the Bill that is currently before the House. Is that not yet another example of the Opposition being split down the middle?

Mr. Redwood: No, I am sure that the quotation has been taken out of context and that my hon. Friend fully supports what I am saying today as this is the agreed shadow Cabinet and shadow team policy of Her Majesty's loyal but effective Opposition. This is a policy based on principle, which I have always held. I note that Ministers do not suggest that I was in favour of the legislation when I was in the Department. If they care to check with their officials privately later, when the rules with regard to what went on in the previous Administration can be bent a little, I am sure that they will be put right on that point.

What is curious—I put it no more strongly than that—is that this Opposition-turned-Government, still behaving on most occasions as an Opposition with a majority rather than as a Government, should have forgotten how strongly they objected to the statement of principle by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State when he announced it, how they opposed it vigorously in those early days and how they have now turned right round and have come up with this as their first piece of legislation, presumably their most important piece of legislation, the thing which the DTI, under this new team, brings to the House of Commons as its priority for this new Session of Parliament and this new Government.

How odd that that should be the Government's conclusion out of all the things they could have done, should have done, might have done, out of all the things that they could have done to satisfy their colleagues on the Benches behind them and all those things that they promised to do in their manifesto.

The DTI under this Government has come to stand for the Department of total incompetence. Here is the Department dedicated to greater openness in government in which one is not even allowed to know which Minister is handling the issue. This is the Department so keen on greater transparency that one is not even allowed to know which Ministers have gone on holiday and which have stayed in the office to man the fort. This is the Department of greater honesty where one is not even allowed to know which Ministers are shareholders in which companies. Will the Government today tell us if any Ministers are missing because they have shareholdings in relevant companies and therefore cannot support or comment on the Bill? Will the Minister answer that point?

Mr. Battle: All DTI Ministers behave entirely properly, in accordance with the ministerial code, to ensure that there is no conflict of interest between their private interests and their ministerial responsibilities. It is about time that the right hon. Gentleman stopped raising that smear and canard across the Floor.

Mr. Redwood: The matter can easily be cleared up. If the Minister and his colleagues will now publish a full list of the things that they cannot do because they have ruled themselves out for fear of conflict, I will end my campaign and I shall be grateful for the information. That is information that the public deserve to know. If the public wish to write to a Minister at the DTI, it is a courtesy to write to the one who is handling the issue. I have had to find out by persistent questioning what the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs is or is not allowed to do. Why do they not clear the matter up here and now by telling the House today which Ministers do what and which things they cannot do?

Meanwhile, the Department of tragic inconsequence is busily giving away its powers to Brussels, to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to the Prime Minister, to the Treasury, to anyone else who will take away its work and responsibilities. The Bill was shunted around the Department and the President, having approved it, has now washed her hands of it. She does that for practically everything going on in the Department. I am amazed that she bothered to pop into the House this afternoon, although I note that she did not hear most of her Minister's speech and has now disappeared again. She has no speaking part in launching the most important Bill that she has chosen for this Session of Parliament. *[Interruption.]* Well, where is the President of the Board of Trade?

Mr. Battle: My right hon. Friend is at a meeting of one of the Cabinet Committees, at which she is entitled to be present. Under the previous Government, about six Bills were put through by Under-Secretaries of State. There was no sign of any member of the Cabinet anywhere near them. For the right hon. Gentleman to make such a miserable point belittles a contribution in which I was becoming interested.

Mr. Redwood: I am glad that the Minister realises that I have some strong points on the Bill, but there are wider points that we must make because we need to know how the Bill is being handled. We can see that the President is not interested in it. I think that she read some of it for the first time on the Treasury Bench when she popped in. I should be at a meeting of the shadow Cabinet this evening, but I thought it more important to be in the House of Commons debating the priority measure chosen by the DTI ministerial team.

The President of the Board of Trade has shown contempt for the House in many ways—by refusing to answer questions, by refusing to come clean about what her Ministers can and cannot do, and now by refusing to be here during most of the proceedings on her chosen piece of legislation.

Mrs. Roche: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Redwood: I was about to say something nice about the hon. Lady, but I will give way instead.

Mrs. Roche: First, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way again. I appreciate his courtesy in doing so. I am not usually one of the world's pleaders, but I plead with the right hon. Gentleman not to say anything nice about me because I would hate my credibility with my colleagues behind me to sink and be damaged.

I have listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. Did the then President of the Board of Trade show contempt for the House and neglect when on 12 February 1991 the right hon. Gentleman, as Minister of State, introduced the British Technology Group Bill? Is this not a case of one rule for the Conservatives when they were in government and another for us now that we are in government? I am sorry that the Opposition have to go to such lengths to make the points that they have made today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I plead with right hon. and hon. Members to recall that this is the Wireless Telegraphy Bill.

Mr. Redwood: That warning will be well heeded by the Opposition, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hasten to reassure you that I have spent most of my time on remarks on the Bill and on the handling of the Bill. It is important, however, to establish which Minister or Ministers will be handling the Bill and why, and how they might be handling it.

From memory, I think that the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry was in the House in support. I cannot be sure about that, but my right hon. Friend was a courteous Secretary of State who answered the Opposition's questions, oral and written, whereas I have had terrible trouble getting any answers out of the present DTI, making me wonder why Ministers are so reluctant to answer such straightforward questions. Why could I not be told during the summer who was on duty and who was on holiday? That is not a terribly difficult question to answer, but I was told that the information was a state secret and that the question could not be answered. Why can we not be told what Ministers can and cannot do?

I return to the Bill, as I have been enjoined to do. I should like to know what happened in the United States when spectrum auctions were introduced. Has the Minister studied that? Has he followed the way in which the bids got out of control and bankruptcies followed? Has he factored that into his calculations?

I see that the one semi-competent Minister in the Department has been drafted in, in part, to help on the Bill. The normal pattern of life at the DTI is that the President decides or dithers, she then passes the matter to the Minister of State, he then gets into a muddle and we have to call upon the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry. I am afraid that I am about to flatter the Minister because I am well aware that it could do her untold damage with her hon. Friends and that would help our cause further. It was no idle slip when the Minister of State called his hon. Friend right honourable. He obviously felt that she was calling the shots and that that dignity should soon pass to her. I predict that we may well find that in Committee the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry does a lot of the work. I look forward to discovering whether that comes true.

The Bill is what civil servants call a brave Bill. "Well, Minister," say the civil servants, "it's the right thing to do and it's very brave of you to take it on." This is a simple measure to tax people for being successful—to tax all those new businesses in telephony, paging and messaging which need access to the airwaves. It may be the first step on the road to that most perfect of all Labour taxes: a tax on breathing—a tax on air itself.

It will be part of the Government's style that they impose back-door taxes on everyone who moves and on quite a few who do not. We have seen it in the Budget and now they are back for more. They are starting with the microwave fixed links and the mobile radio concerns. We need to know why it should be them. Why are the Government discriminating in this way? Why is there an injustice in the Bill and in their intentions?

Considering the events of the past three weeks, I wondered whether the Bill was perhaps a part of a larger plan—to discipline the spin doctors who have spun so out of control. I have been told that spin doctors do most of their work on mobile telephones, and that they are some of the biggest users of the airwaves. What better way of bringing them to heel than by taxing their little game?

Mr. Battle: What do those comments have to do with the Bill?

Mr. Redwood: They are central to the Bill, because the Bill is a tax on spin doctoring, and it will impose a cash limit on the Department that employs them. Even some Labour Members understand the point of my comments. If that is the Government's objective in passing the Bill, however, I should tell them that it will not work. The first law of spin doctoring is that of its own indispensability. If there are cuts to be made in departmental budgets, they will be made not among the spinners but elsewhere.

I then wondered whether the President of the Board of Trade and her men have decided to pursue a vendetta against the new methods of control over Labour Members, because the Bill will impose a pager tax. Perhaps there is seething indignation over the way in which Labour Members are being silenced and fed the daily banality on their pagers. It is the President's revenge, striking at the very nerve centre—for there is no heart—of new Labour: the command and control module at the Mandelsonian core. The policy will not work.

Dr. Palmer: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Redwood: Surely there is not a reply on the pager already.

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene once more. I should like merely to return the debate from his increasingly frivolous comments to the subject of the Bill. Did he disagree with the Conservative party's general election manifesto, in which Conservatives decided to call for competitive pricing in large parts of radio management—so that substantial revenue increases would result?

Mr. Redwood: As I said, my principal objection to the Bill is its wide-ranging tax-raising powers and the likelihood of a £1,500 million tax increase.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Answer the question.

Mr. Redwood: I will not go into my views on the details of the most recent Conservative manifesto, which was put to the electorate and rejected. We are now working on a much better model to present next time to the electors. Meanwhile, our job is to try to hold this miserable Government to account and to discover why and by how much they wish to tax those in the telecommunications industry. I think that we shall find that new Labour lives by pagers alone, whatever the cost—which I am sure that Ministers will pass on.

It is a pity that the President of the Board of Trade thinks that this Bill is the most important legislation when we could be debating competition legislation or some

[Mr. Redwood]

other measure in new Labour's job destruction programme. Her dithering for almost half a year over the P and O and Stena matter threatens jobs and livelihoods on cross-channel services. Why can she not be in the Chamber today to debate that matter? In the brewing industry, 1,500 jobs have been lost because of one of her few decisions. There has been no debate in the House about those job losses, although Labour Members in affected constituencies are quietly seething. It is time for those hon. Members to speak up for their constituents.

The President's Department is busily watching the collapse of the coal industry, and there has been no vigorous response to the unfair German competition which is threatening our pits. The President did nothing when Asfordby closed, and she stands poised to do nothing as other pits close. It is no wonder that the new President's old friends on the left feel that she has abandoned them.

What a pity it is that the President cannot spare any of her own time to look into the plight of the Cornish tin industry when it, too, is threatened with closure. Instead, she confines herself to taxing success.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. My previous pleadings seem to have failed. May I please direct the right hon. Gentleman to the fact that we are debating the Wireless Telegraphy Bill. His comments do not fall within the wide title of that Bill.

Mr. Redwood: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you are right to remind me of that fact. I was attempting to demonstrate the fact that this Bill was an unfortunate choice for a Department that is so burdened with problems and wrong policies. As the President of the Board of Trade will not be in the Chamber for the reply, I will not have an opportunity to ask her in person about those matters, and that will be a great pity for the House. Hon. Members would like occasionally to see their President of the Board of Trade so that they can hold her to account.

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry asked me what else, if not this Bill, could be done to provide the spectrum that our growing industry needs. He might look in the history books through which he has been trawling to discover what the previous Government did in recent years. When I was a Minister, we reviewed the spectrum and negotiated with the public bodies that were holding too much of it. They shed that spectrum, which we made available for other users.

Why does the Minister not start there? In his own remarks, he said that the current system has worked pretty well up to this point. We made it work by removing spectrum from public bodies that had been hoarding too much of it. Today, he himself has said that spectrum hoarding is occurring. Much of that hoarding must still be in the public sector, because that sector tends to be the dominant holder of spectrum which has been passed down over the years.

The House needs to know how the President will sort out the mess over powers in this legislation, how she will find sufficient spectrum for the exciting new services that will be available and how she will claim that she will be fair to the different parts of the industry in a Bill that is currently lopsided and unfair.

The Bill states that between £500 million and £1,500 million will be raised, and that there will be another £75 million on top of that. Why cannot Ministers decide now how much money they wish to raise with the Bill—how much they wish to plunder from the industry—and tell the House? The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry says that the amount will depend on the auction prices. Of course it will depend on the prices, but Ministers have it within their power to decide how long to run the auctions and how much spectrum to sell in them. Therefore, why does not the Minister tell the House the limits of his ambition for raising money from a very successful industry?

Why has the Minister not done any homework on how many jobs will be lost and how many businesses could be closed by taxation on this scale and by shifting systems to provide spectrum to a crucial industry? Why have not Ministers worked out how much the measure will cost the public sector? Why have they not included in the Bill safeguards for the emergency services that require special frequencies? When will they strengthen all the assurances given in another place, and given again in today's debate, and include them in the Bill for which they are responsible? The Bill is a sloppy measure, poorly drafted and not properly thought through. The Minister would be well advised to take it away and try to improve it.

Has the Minister consulted the health service about the extra costs that will be imposed on it? Will the Government increase the budgets of Departments that will be affected, such as the Department of Health and the Ministry of Defence—or will there be more ward and bed closures to pay the bills? Perhaps the President's budget should again be raided, as it was the other day, to pay for mistakes elsewhere.

After weeks of surrender of territory by the DTI, there is a rumour that the President is to become overlord of regional grants—not to give out more to the telecommunications industry, which may be in need of a handout after her Department is finished with it, but to scale back the passion, particularly of the Secretary of State for Wales, for spending more. I believe that the President has to come to the defence of the northern region to protect the Prime Minister and his northern interests.

The President's new role, however, is not the end of her territorial ambitions. After five months of burying her head in the sands of the DTI, her ultimate reward has been to become one of the five people entrusted with preparing the United Kingdom for economic and monetary union and the abolition of the pound. It must have been her enthusiasm, in 1980, for complete withdrawal from the European Economic Community that led to her appointment. She said then that none of the arguments for staying in the EEC could be sustained. Perhaps her appointment was a result of her remarks, in 1990, that Britain should be "global rather than European". How can anyone say that new Labour is without a sense of humour when the President has been appointed to deal with EMU rather than to get on with the more crucial job in her Department of straightening out the Bill and answering a few questions in the House about her real responsibilities?

The UK requires a strong telecommunications industry and more spectrum to open up new services. As a Minister, one of the tasks that I was most pleased to perform was finding more spectrum to allow more new services, putting us ahead of the world in many spheres.

I did not require a tax to accomplish that objective; I simply found more spectrum in the public sector's horde.

Mr. Battle: I do not wish to take away anything from the right hon. Gentleman. When he was a Minister, he did find space in the public sector. I seem to recall, however, that the public sector accounts for about 40 per cent. of the total. Although some efficiencies were made in the public sector, we must deal with the private sector, which accounts for the other 60 per cent. That is the purpose of the Bill. We have introduced the Bill because we cannot squeeze more spectrum out of the public sector. If he thinks that he could have found more spectrum in the public sector, why on earth did he not do so?

Mr. Redwood: I set up a continuing review programme which would have progressively squeezed more out. I wonder whether the Minister has even tried to do that. I think that he has blundered into the Bill and has been given this excuse for it by his officials. I doubt whether he has had any meetings to try to free spectrum from any parts of the economy. He thinks that it can all be done by imposing tax increases.

The Bill sums up all that is wrong with the Department of Trade and Industry. It is bad for business and will cost us jobs and technical leadership. It is mean-minded and badly drafted. Ministers cannot even tell us to the nearest billion pounds what the tax will raise. The Opposition cannot support the Bill. We will demand improvements and we will harry it here and in Committee. It is not good enough. The industry and Britain deserve better. Labour is bad for business.

5.51 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (East Ham): I am pleased to follow the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood)—I followed his speech with interest. It is extraordinary that he launched such a savage attack on a measure that was in the Conservative party's manifesto. It will be interesting to see whether other Conservative Members follow his line and oppose their manifesto, or whether some of them agreed with the manifesto on which they fought the election.

I want to confine my remarks to three specific points. I want to talk about some of the newly emerging demands for radio spectrum that underline the Bill's importance in ensuring that spectrum is available in a properly managed way; I want to ask my hon. Friend the Minister for clarification about the Bill's impact on existing operators, because some confusion about that was raised in interventions from Conservative Members; and I want to make a suggestion for an addition to the Bill.

Many new demands for spectrum are emerging. Many of the points I want to make arise from discussions with the Telecommunications Users Association of which I have been the honorary president for a couple of years. It is an entirely unpaid role, which I have already declared, but I do so again now. It keeps me in touch with developments in the telecommunications industry and with the needs of small and large telecommunications users. One of the central contentions of the association is that for many users, particularly small business users, there is very little competition between suppliers of telecommunications services.

The previous Government talked a great deal about introducing competition to the telecommunications marketplace. In the City of London, there is a great deal of competition between rival suppliers and that is welcome. For big business pretty well anywhere in the country, there are plenty of suppliers from which to choose. However, in many parts of the country, and in many towns outside the major metropolitan areas, there is all too often no real choice of supplier in practice for small businesses.

New uses of the radio spectrum, commercialised as the Bill envisages, may provide the means to offer the variety and choice of services that has been lacking. One of the important benefits of the Bill will be to ensure that radio spectrum is available in an efficient way to provide for the new services that have not been secured under the previous arrangements.

The Broadband Wireless Association promotes wireless as the

"low cost gateway to interactive television."

It has a conference about that in a couple of months. It says that the build cost per customer of a cable-type service provided by wireless will be about half that of a traditional digging-up-the-pavement cable solution. Assuming that about 30 per cent. penetration is achieved, that significant cost reduction can be secured. A wireless approach to cable transforms the economics of the cable industry. It will make cable economic in rural and other areas where it has been impossible to provide traditional cable services so far.

One of the cable companies with a franchise in Devon wants to use spectrum currently unallocated in the 43 GHz range. There is an impressive new technology, manufactured in the United Kingdom by Philips in Manchester and GEC Marconi among others, which will provide cable-type services by wireless. It is an interesting approach and a good example of the band width-hungry new technologies we will see emerging in the near future. It illustrates how cable operators, confined to their existing franchise areas, could expand to cover other areas quite quickly and relatively inexpensively using wireless technology. Ionica of Cambridge has been mentioned; it is already rolling out local telephone services based on wireless.

All such developments underscore the need for better management of the radio spectrum, including appropriate mechanisms for charging. That is why I support the Bill. It will provide a properly ordered approach to this issue.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am following the hon. Gentleman's speech carefully—I almost called him my hon. Friend because we sit on so many Committees together. Does he agree with the Government's view that about £1.5 billion can be raised from the industry? Does he think that that is a good idea or does he think that the money could be better spent within the industry, expanding the service and making it cheaper for consumers?

Mr. Timms: It is difficult to say how much money will be raised by the Bill, but there is no doubt that an orderly approach to spectrum allocation, which is enshrined in this Bill and which was in the Conservative party's manifesto, is the right way to go. My discussions with people in the industry suggest that that is overwhelmingly

[Mr. Timms]

their view as well. The mobile operators do not oppose the Bill in the way suggested by the right hon. Member for Wokingham a moment ago.

I want to ask my hon. Friend the Minister about the way in which the Bill will be put into effect. My hon. Friend said that there will not be blanket auctions for every piece of the spectrum, but I wonder what consultation he envisages will take place before a decision is made to auction any given piece of spectrum. I have two concerns and I shall use as my example the 43 GHz range for broadband wireless to which I have already referred. If that piece of the spectrum was auctioned, there could be a danger of undermining a promising new technology. I know that the Government would not wish to stifle that by piling on heavy charges too early in its development.

Equally, as I understand it, the technology would allow competitors to share the same piece of band width with different companies using the same parcel of band width. An auction would probably not be the most appropriate charging mechanism in that case. What steps will be taken to consult potential participants in the industry before any decision is made to auction a piece of the spectrum? Can the Minister confirm that, before there is an auction of any new part of the spectrum, there will be consultation about the appropriateness of that approach?

I want to clarify the impact of the Bill on existing operators. I welcome what my hon. Friend said about the establishment of a spectrum management advisory group. That will be widely welcomed in the industry because it has been pressing for that. What will be the impact on the existing mobile operators? The House of Commons briefing paper suggests that there will not be an impact on existing operators. It gives the example of Vodafone, where the licence has more than 20 years to run. That is almost certainly a misunderstanding, as it relates to its Office of Telecommunications licence. I understand that the Radiocommunications Agency's licence for the use of spectrum by existing operators is renewable each year.

The Bill will lead to a change in the way in which existing operators are charged for the use of spectrum from next year. I believe that that answers the concerns raised by the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce). The Bill does not mean that charges will not be imposed on existing operators; instead, a level playing field is created for them. Perhaps the Minister can spell out how far thinking has gone on that matter.

My hon. Friend repeated the commitment made in another place that there will be no auctions for existing operators. How will charges for existing operators be computed? Is it realistic to expect that mechanism to be in place by next year?

Mr. Prior: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the point that I tried to raise earlier and to which I did not receive a proper answer. As I understand it, the existing licensees, who tend to be big companies, will not be contributing to the £1.5 billion. All the additional money will come from new entrants who, by definition, will be smaller companies.

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood what my hon. Friend said. He made it clear that existing operators will not be participating in auctions, but that does not mean that they will not be paying charges. The appropriate mechanism for that will be set out in the Bill.

Mr. Ian Bruce: If the hon. Gentleman considers the financial effects of the Bill, it will be clear to him—it is about the only thing that is clear about the Bill—that the sums of between £500 million and £1.5 billion which will possibly come from auctions are set against an increase in charges to existing operators of only £75 million a year. Even if the industry thinks that that is fair, it wants to know whether one group of operators using a piece of spectrum should pay only an extra £75 million a year, while the new entrants will have to pay £1.5 billion to use exactly the same sort of spectrum.

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman is supporting my argument; there will be charges on existing operators. I want to know how those charging mechanisms will be established.

I do not know whether Conservative Members agree with their spokesman, but I have no objection to charging for the radio spectrum or to the competitive mechanism that is enshrined in the Bill. Those proposals are entirely appropriate and I do not believe that anyone in the industry or throughout the country seriously objects to them. They are entirely right.

My third concern relates to protecting consumers' interests. I should like to take up the debate initiated in another place, where it was proposed that the Bill should contain an explicit reference to the interests of consumers in relation to the spectrum allocation process. I know that the Telecommunications Users Association supports that idea, but it was opposed by the Minister in another place on the ground that the existing protection of user interests in the Telecommunications Act 1984, which requires Oftel and the Secretary of State to promote the interests of consumers, is sufficient. I am not entirely convinced and I wonder whether the Minister can comment further on that issue. It appears to me that Oftel has no significant locus to look after consumer interests when it comes to spectrum allocation. Is it the Government's intention that consumer interests should be taken into account in that connection? If so, and I am absolutely certain that it is, such consumer interest should be catered for in the Bill.

The Community Media Association—it was known as the Community Radio Association but it was renamed at the weekend—includes a large number of interesting and enterprising members who represent community-based radio and media initiatives. It has stated:

> "Information technology is essential to assuring freedom of information and expression, social inclusion and cultural diversity. The CMA would like to see amendments brought forward in Committee to take account of the social and cultural benefits of use of the radio spectrum."

No doubt the Committee will wish to consider its concerns.

I have three concerns. First, can we be assured that there will be consultation before a decision is made to auction any given piece of radio spectrum? Secondly, how will the new, different charges be computed for existing mobile operators? Is it realistic to expect such a mechanism to be in place by next year? Thirdly, when determining such matters, will the Bill contain an explicit reference to ensure that consumer interests should be taken into account?

I support the Bill. I am astonished by the stance taken by the Opposition spokesman when it was the Government he supported who started down that road. I warmly commend the Minister for introducing the Bill.

6.5 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I am most grateful to be called so early in the debate. One of the silver linings, albeit unwanted, of the defeat of so many of my colleagues has been that I have been catapulted into being a senior member of the Conservative party. I therefore now get to make my speeches earlier in proceedings. That is a rather sad reflection, but at least it reveals some modesty on our Benches.

I declare an interest as a paid adviser to the Telecommunications Managers Association. On this occasion, however, I specifically asked it not to brief me so that I could feel free to make my views known.

I am glad to follow the hon. Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms), who probed the Minister in exactly the same way as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and other colleagues have sought to do. It is not as though hon. Members and the industry cannot agree on how to go forward to get a good return for the taxpayer while allowing the industry to go forth and multiply. I do not believe that the Minister or his Department have any nasty intent, but I do not trust the Treasury perhaps as much as he does because the Treasury exists to get the maximum return for the taxpayer.

On Second Reading and in Committee, we will try to probe the Minister more about what the Government intend to do. A new entrant to the industry needs to know the Government's intentions to plan for the type of approaches that might be made.

It is easy for existing operators using existing spectrum to rush to cuddle the Government warmly, and even the Opposition, and say that they are keen on the idea of auctioning the rest of the spectrum. Once that is done, the spectrum that those operators already own is instantaneously given a capital value. The farmers hated their milk quotas until they suddenly realised that, overnight, the Government had created a capital asset that they could sell on. After all, they had their milk quotas for nothing. We must be careful about how we deal with such proposals.

My right hon. Friend said that the Opposition were deeply critical of the Bill because we want to get the proposals right. The Bill must not allow the Treasury to rub its hands with glee, saying, "On the first bid we will go for £1.5 billion and see what we can get later." The balance between existing operators and new entrants is crucial and it is a difficult one to strike successfully.

The history of the previous Government's efforts to allocate spectrum and allow television companies to bid for franchises reveals that the most difficult aspect was making the process fair. The arithmetic and problems will not change for the Labour Government. We will therefore be keen to probe the Government to determine what they have in mind. We will want to get as much information as possible, if not on the face of the Bill, at least discussed in Committee. I give Ministers fair notice that we want to hear in Committee exactly what they are thinking of doing. Ministers have benefited from the consultation put in train by the previous Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor), and the information that that has provided.

Many consultation papers were put out by the Radiocommunications Agency and other bodies, so it is not good enough for the Government to say that they will continue with the consultation. If that is what they want to do, let us leave the Bill for a few months and get the consultation over. We and the industry need to know what the Government intend to do.

Although I am sure that the information appears on the face of the Bill, I can never read these things properly, so I want to know whether we are to have the affirmative or the negative resolution procedure for the regulations the Secretary of State will be empowered to make. Often, we receive telephone calls from a business or organisation asking, "Why did you vote to put this charge or this amount of extra tax on me?" and we do not remember doing anything of the sort because the measure disappeared in a resolution that would have needed a prayer laid against it for it to have been brought before us.

It is important that we should know, because we are dealing with a crucial industry that is one of the fastest-expanding parts of our economy. The Minister was somewhat aggressive towards my right hon. and hon. Friends in trying to suggest that we are here simply to oppose the Government. In fact, we are trying to get to the facts and it is important that we do so.

I received a letter from the Federation of Communication Services, which represents existing operators—those who already have spectrum—especially businesses in the mobile telephony sector and those in related fields, such as radio. It is worth reading to the House the list of concerns set out in the letter, although the Minister will be pleased to learn that he has already acceded to the fourth request or demand in the list, which is to the good. The first concern is that

> "the new spectrum pricing regime should be fair, equitable and transparent and should apply to all users in order to maximise efficient spectrum use".

I have already remarked on the difficulty of achieving fairness and avoiding imposing double taxation or charging people for things of which they had free use in the past while allowing new entrants in and ensuring equity between them and existing operators. That is a difficult balance to strike.

The second point is that there should be a

> "clear statement of Government policy as to where it will apply auctions and administrative pricing, now and in the future".

The Minister says that that is still being discussed, but before we give the Government the powers they seek, we want to know what they and the Treasury have in mind. We must get clear statements from Ministers.

The FCS's third point is that

> "the Radio Agency's (RA) ideas for implementing spectrum pricing are at an early stage and require much more thorough analysis of spectrum congestion, monitoring mechanisms and the derivation of the Spectrum Tariff Unit before licence fees can be set. In a combined response to the RA's May 1997 consultative document, the mobile communication industry and radio users proposed a partnership approach with the Agency to develop this new mechanism".

I hope that the Government will look carefully at how to work in partnership with the industry.

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

The fourth point is one to which, as I said, the Minister has just acceded. It was that

"there should be a new consultation body, the Spectrum Management Advisory Group reporting directly to the Minister."

I am keen that the Minister should understand that the existing industry will want to advise Ministers and it is right that it should do that, but I hope that Ministers will take independent advice from users and potential new entrants.

The European Informatics Market Group, which operates within the House, has all of the industry on board and its representatives get together and come up with wonderful reports. As a member of the editorial board, one of my roles is to say, "Hang on a minute. This is the view of the people already here, but we also have to think about the people who may want to come in and, even more important, about the user—the person who has one mobile phone and does not really know what is available, but who has a real interest in ensuring that the products are available at a sensible price." That is extremely important.

The key questions posed by the FCS are:

"what is Government policy on the application of administrative pricing and auctions; whether Government can give assurance to small and medium sized businesses that the spectrum they currently use, or may wish to access in future to provide the same services, will not be auctioned;"

and

"whether the Government will adopt a partnership approach with industry and users to develop the implementation mechanisms for administrative pricing."

Those are valid questions and they must be addressed in Committee.

I turn now to the interesting case of the fishermen. The amount of money involved is small, but the fishing industry is deeply annoyed and we all know how much pressure the industry has been under in recent years. Fishermen are now subject to additional expense because—quite rightly—we have demanded that the safety of those who work on fishing boats must be paramount. In addition to normal safety gear, which almost requires boats to be extended to carry all that the Government want them to have on board, they must have access to radios.

In many cases, the radios that boats are required to have on board—some requirements are already mandatory, while some are still being pushed through the system—are used only in emergencies. Many of my fishermen are inshore fishermen and the best way for them to ring up their wives or their fish merchant is to use a mobile phone, not to use the radio to which they often do not have immediate access. However, to get in touch with the emergency services when they see someone else in trouble—another vessel reports a vessel in trouble in the vast majority of cases—they have to have the radios on board.

A long time ago, it was brought to my attention that the sum fishermen had to pay for their licences under the existing regime was subsidising those who install in their fancy yacht radios for leisure and other purposes. Providers of services for leisure fishermen who used their radios far more often got a cheaper licence than professional fishermen who required a radio for safety reasons.

I had a good response from my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton when he was the Minister. He met representatives from the fishing industry and felt that changes should be made to regulations. I am sure that my hon. Friend will not be upset if I offer to supply copies of the correspondence between us; the last letter I received directly from him was dated 29 October 1996, in which he agreed that a case had been made out.

The current Minister may have access to a copy of the letter dated 3 April 1997 from the chief executive of the Radiocommunications Agency, Jim Norton, in which he said that the agency was ready to make a decision. If the Conservative Government had been re-elected, we would probably have enacted that decision by now, but I shall give the new Ministers time to look at the evidence. They should try to do something for the fishermen, who are using the radios for their own safety and for that of others on the high seas.

This is an important Bill, but it could slow the wonderful expansion of our mobile communications and other types of communication. In many countries, the Government have said that only so much spectrum is available, held an auction and people have paid vast sums for it. Then, suddenly, the Treasury has said "Oh, hang on—there's another lump of spectrum over here." Suddenly, twice as much spectrum has become available, and the people who have paid a high price for what they have are stuck with it and have to pass on high charges to their customers, whereas other operators entering the market later have paid a much lower price because of the greater availability of spectrum. It is, as I say, a difficult balance to strike and we must be careful not to repeat the mistakes that have been made by other countries.

6.19 pm

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): Speaking as a former psychiatrist, I must begin by wondering what the shadow Secretary of State was on today. There have been times in my life when I could have done with some of it.

I have a confession to make: I am a closet technology user. I even joined the internet this summer. I do not yet have a page on it, but that will come once I learn to use it properly. I even have a pager—although I am not sure where it is at the moment. I put it away somewhere at the start of the summer recess and have never found it again. I also have a mobile phone. I hasten to add, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I do not have it with me in the Chamber; I would not want to incur your displeasure if it went off in the middle of my short speech this evening.

I want first to refer to the question of job losses and to try to put it in context. Just one company, Orange, has in the past two or three years spent £1.5 billion on developing its mobile telephony network. It was prepared to put up that much money, which I would call a huge sum. Indeed, it may be an over-optimistic sum given how much the company may expect to recoup, but it is small beer compared with the money that large companies will invest in the development of telecommunications over the next 10 years. The sums we are talking about pale into insignificance compared with the sums involved in setting up networks.

The shadow Secretary of State, for reasons of his own, was being somewhat malicious today. I do not seriously believe that Conservative Members think that there will be serious job losses as a result of this relatively minor—although important—measure.

In line with what we tend to do in the Labour party these days, I want to stress a point about education. It is clear that the shadow Minister and his colleagues learned nothing from the speech by the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry. As I am a great traditionalist in educational matters, I intend to resort to traditional methods and to repeat what the Minister said in a slightly different form, in the hope that, by means of rote learning, some of it may stick in the minds—if they have them—of Conservative Members. Thereafter we may not hear so much nonsense from them. I hasten to dissociate that remark from the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), who as always made a sensible speech.

After 10 years of attending these technology debates, I know that the same old suspects turn up for all of them. I am glad to say that there are some new faces around today; perhaps they will enlighten us, perhaps not—I live in hope.

I offer a whole-hearted welcome to the Bill, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and her departmental colleagues on the clarity of its provisions. Like most modern Bills, this is largely an enabling measure. Many of the detailed provisions will emerge later. That follows the example given us in full measure by the Tories, and we intend to follow it ruthlessly now that we are in government. While the use of statutory instruments may be deplored when one disagrees with their contents, when one does agree with them they are a convenient way of putting legislation into practice. They allow us time to get the Bill on the statute book and then to unravel some of the knotty problems that turn up, as they always do, at a later date.

The Bill establishes certain principles of which I am wholly in favour. Indeed, I argued forcefully for them before the last election, and I was pleased that the then Secretary of State, Ian Lang, took them up. I am only sorry that his successor in the Tory party seems to have disowned what Ian Lang said. I wonder how many more of the former Government's policies will be disowned by Conservative spokesmen in the coming weeks and months.

I also congratulate my colleagues on the speed with which the Bill has been introduced. The Bill had its Second Reading in another place on 5 June, a mere four weeks after Parliament reassembled. It is a sensible and long overdue legislative measure that will help to establish some order in what is rapidly becoming, if left uncontrolled, a chaotic and crowded market.

That market is probably our key economic sector—communications, both broadcast and point-to-point. I look forward keenly to future DTI Bills. I understand that there is to be one on competition policy shortly. We strenuously advocated such a measure when in opposition, but shamefully the Conservative Government avoided such a Bill. If I may be permitted a small passing indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, might I ask if it is too much to hope for a Bill or a statement on energy policy, another of my major interests? The Minister has a rather resigned look on his face at that suggestion, so perhaps he will not get to his feet to grant my request. I regret that, but perhaps once these other Bills are out of the way he will be able to devote his energies to a subject that is of great strategic importance to this country.

Radio-based communication is a key component in the rapidly converging field of the information super-highway which, as everyone in the Chamber will know—those not interested in the subject do not bother to attend these debates—is an amalgamation of telecommunications, broadcasting and computing in one huge and rather diverse entity. If successfully developed, it will bring vast economic and social benefits to our country.

I am well aware of all the hype surrounding convergence. As I said at the outset, I am a rather reluctant user of technology even though I understand it well enough. Sometimes I do not have the time to be bothered with it. It brings problems as well as solutions, but overall it will be beneficial and it is to be encouraged for that reason.

It is no exaggeration to say that our future economic success will depend on how well and how quickly the super-highway becomes fully established. It was the previous Administration, I admit, who were responsible for the rapid introduction of full competition to our telecommunications market. That has given us a competitive advantage over our slower European neighbours. It is fun to watch the antics in Germany and France as they reluctantly attempt to privatise just a small part of their telecommunications system. It makes one realise that it is just as well that ours was privatised when it was. It pays to recognise that not everything done by previous Administrations was bad, and there is no doubt that the early freeing up of our telecommunications market was a very good thing.

Now that we have this competitive advantage, it is up to us to exploit it to the full. I honestly believe that the Bill is a significant step towards maximising that advantage. By reducing the influence of one of the key obstacles to progress, the shortage of radio spectrum, the Bill will give us a better chance to develop the market quickly.

Radio-based communication on a mass scale is a relatively recent phenomenon. It has grown up in little more than a decade from a patchy service mainly based around major conurbations to a virtually universal service—although some of the wilds of Scotland are still not covered. The phones do not always work up there, which is a great pity. The ubiquitous mobile phone accompanies us everywhere, except into this Chamber. Mobile phones are not much use, however, on the east coast rail network, which seems to have more black spots than—I am not quite sure what comparison to use: too many, in any case. The development of networks and the use of more spectrum will allow increased coverage of such areas. I do not enjoy having to try six times to get through when I am on a train journey. I resent that all the more because I use a digital phone which is not supposed to encounter such problems.

Radio-based communications are used widely by businesses and private users. They are used by taxi companies, by the new system for tracing stolen vehicles, by the emergency services and in new technologies such as global positioning. I know that I cut a rather unlikely figure as a hillwalker in Scotland, but people do get caught out by fog, rain and snow in the hills. On such occasions this type of technology can even be life-saving. Global positioning, traffic management and all types of things will add to the future load—quite apart from developments in broadcasting, which I shall come to shortly.

Radio communication competes with and is complementary to a fixed-link communication system based on copper wire, fibre-optic and co-axial cables, with

[Dr. Lewis Moonie]

which we are familiar. Within the next few years, the introduction of the universal mobile telecommunications service will revolutionise personal communications in this country in a way that few of us imagine. It will reduce costs and should serve to allow access to the technology to anyone who wants it.

Some observers believe that a combination of radio links to the home and a fibre-optic fixed-link network for longer-distance transmission of information is the way in which the country should go, and that it could drive out the slower competitive systems, especially if considerable cost advantages are quickly gained by introducing a system that is cheaper to install.

Digital services have developed in parallel with that general increase in the use of radio spectrum. Digital phones are now commonplace. The Broadcasting Act 1996 was aimed at encouraging the rapid introduction of digital television and radio services, offering us more channels, better reception and enhanced services. We are still waiting, but some time in the next year the television should come limping along. Who knows—perhaps some time in the following year, radio will follow suit. One can only hope.

Digital services have the advantage of requiring less spectrum than their analogue counterparts, and once they completely replace them will allow us a massive increase in the volume of radio-based traffic, as will new technologies such as the compression techniques, which have been developed at Stamford and other universities, that will allow us to transmit far more data over a relevant piece of spectrum than has been possible. Unfortunately, at the same time we must continue to broadcast the older analogue services, which are greedy in the use of spectrum. In the first instance, therefore, the introduction of digital technology merely adds more to the burden—it does not help us much in the short term.

Analogue services will continue to be broadcast for a considerable time, as I reckon that the changeover will be relatively slow. Market research has shown that the people who are likely to switch to digital television are those who already hold a cable or satellite contract, and that those who do not are far less likely to do so. However, some time in future they may—perhaps in the third or fourth Labour Government after this one, about 10 or 15 years from now. I am glad to see that the Opposition still have a sense of humour—they will need it in years to come. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) has a reasonable majority, so he may well still be in the House then, remembering these remarks; I may be here myself.

[*Interruption.*] This is a brief summary of the present technological situation—the base on which we are working. We have a scarce resource, radio spectrum, which until now has been treated almost as a free good. We know what happens to free goods. The hon. Member for South Dorset has just left, but hon. Members should take fish as an example if they want to know what happens to a free good when it is ruthlessly exploited. We need a form of effective management. The most effective system of management is through price, and I cannot understand how the Conservative party can reject a pricing mechanism for establishing a market in a service. It strikes me as basic economics and common sense. When we cannot think of another way of doing it effectively, there is no alternative. I wonder where I have heard that phrase before. Come on; we are slow tonight. *[Laughter]*. That's better.

We have a scarce resource, which a growing number of users wish to exploit. We have a new technology, digitally based, which will ultimately ease the problem but which exacerbates it in the short term. That is the rationale for the Bill. We need a coherent strategy for managing radio spectrum. It depends on several key elements, but effective allocation by an economic pricing mechanism must be the basic component.

Quite simply, the Bill introduces a necessary pricing mechanism and sets up a framework for the future allocation. By insisting that price is used to maximise the efficient allocation of spectrum rather than as a means of maximising revenue, I hope that the Department has managed to avoid the pitfalls and problems manifested by recent US attempts to do the same thing. I admit that it disappoints me. I see nothing wrong in seeking new sources of revenue. That is the Government's job. If they find new sources of revenue, they can tax people less in other areas, which strikes me as common sense. I accept, however, that in this instance—

Mr. Lansley: Is it the hon. Gentleman's view, therefore, that the Government should be thinking of compensating reductions in business taxation to offset the increase in business costs that derives from the pricing of the radio spectrum?

Dr. Moonie: Certainly not. The present market in mobile communications has shown us that companies are enormously profitable and can well stand to bear a bit more for the resources that they use. It will have not the slightest impact on their business, it will have minimal impact on their customers and everyone benefits from a better mechanism. That strikes me as a commonsense mechanism to introduce, and one which deserves support from all quarters of the House.

The fact that the Department has concentrated on using price as an effective allocation mechanism rather than purely as a means of raising additional revenue may help us to avoid the pitfalls that befell the US system. The US Government were less effective—too greedy. They tried to maximise revenue instead of maximising efficient allocation of spectrum and, in doing so, encouraged companies to overstep the mark and submit bids that were too high. Some of the companies failed to survive as a result. The mechanisms that we are introducing by means of the Bill should avoid that.

It is right that Governments should retain the power not to accept only the highest bid—that they should examine the bids and decide which one it is appropriate to accept. Before any hon. Member tries to intervene, I should say that I accept that that raises problems in itself, and I trust that the Government will carefully consider those problems in Committee and thereafter before they introduce the appropriate regulations that govern how the system works.

Existing users are exempted for the duration of present licences, but not for ever. That is a source of some self-congratulation to them and some disappointment to those who might wish the Government to maximise their revenue more quickly. It is a generally accepted principle, however, that existing contracts are honoured, so good luck to those existing users, however advantageous it is for them; they managed to get the contract for the spectrum. Although they will not get it again, they can take full advantage of it in the next few years.

Ultimately, almost all users will have to pay a realistic market price for the spectrum that they wish to use. People talk about new entrants to the market as though a tuppenny-ha'penny company will be set up in a back room. It will not be like that. The existing companies may decide to expand into other areas and find themselves bidding for additional spectrum. That will have the additional advantage that they will seek to use the spectrum that they have more effectively before entering the market, which should reduce the pressure on the new spectrum that we are trying to allocate. It will ensure that every piece of spectrum that has been allocated already is used to maximum effect.

Would that some of the users who have had spectrum allocated to them, such as the BBC and the Ministry of Defence—the arch-hoarder of spectrum in this country—could be encouraged, through an appropriate pricing mechanism, to disgorge some of the spectrum that they have. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry is well aware of the problem and I am sure that he has at the back of his mind a way of ensuring that they are gently encouraged to cough up the bits that they do not need, so that other people may get access to them and use them more effectively.

I hope that my hon. Friends the Ministers will consider a small suggestion. There is a plethora of regulators in broadcasting and communication. In the past we advocated rationalisation, and I believe that the system that is proposed—in addition to the advisory committee, which I welcome—might work better, allocating licences on a qualitative assessment of bids, if it were made part of the remit of an external regulator, such as the Ofcom that was proposed to replace the Office of Telecommunications. Ministers might care to consider that in detail. The provisions in clause 4 give the Secretary of State the power to do something along those lines, should she wish. I certainly hope that it will be given careful consideration.

I should like now to say a few words on behalf of the Commercial Radio Companies Association, the chief executive of which, Paul Brown, wrote to me last week. I have had a close association with him over many years and told him that I was happy to put the points that he wanted to raise to my colleagues in the Department in the hope that they could give some satisfaction when summing up on the Bill. I shall quote from the letter of 22 October because that will be easier than trying to paraphrase it. It says:

> "I remain sure that there is a case for an amendment to the legislation which the Government might feel able to consider. . . .
>
> Spectrum is a national asset. Its use should be well controlled and priced. Commercial radio welcomes the Government's move towards increasing the efficiency with which spectrum is used. The Secretary of State's powers over spectrum usage, as laid down in the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949, have always been significant and wide. They have been handled sensitively and responsibly and there is no reason to believe that they will not continue to be so.
>
> The proposed new legislation rejects the old idea that spectrum users should only be charged pretty much the price associated with its management. In the future, prices will be based on the commercial value of the spectrum being used by each Wireless Telegraphy licensee. As it says in the preamble, 'the Bill provides for fees, other than fees for licences for television reception, to be set by regulations having regard to various other factors or by auction'.
>
> It is clearly right for the Government to have flexible powers to ensure that space is made swiftly available to new digital technologies and new ideas for spectrum use as yet unthought of. It is also right that changes in charges and usage should be preceded by consultation as clause 6 of the Wireless Telegraphy Bill requires so that the fairness of price increases or usage changes can be fully debated before they occur . . .
>
> We have also been gratified to read and hear the statements that have been made that the Bill is not intended to require UK broadcasters to bid for spectrum in the same way as, for example, mobile telephone companies will be required to do. We note, however, that this protection is not afforded on the face of the Bill. We would therefore like to propose an amendment which the Government might favour and put forward as its own.
>
> An amendment to clause 3(1) would suffice: we have in mind something in line of 2 of page 3 of the Bill . . . along the lines '. . . applications for the grant of wireless telegraphy licences, *except those for the broadcast of a television or radio service for reception by the general public*, must be made in accordance with a procedure which'".

I should be grateful if the Government would look at that. I shall send them a copy of the letter so that they need not comb through *Hansard* for it, and I hope that they will give it a sympathetic hearing. The suggested amendment is a small change but it would be greatly appreciated by those concerned.

I conclude my remarks by referring to a sector that is often overlooked as being too unimportant for active consideration. I refer to the developing field of community radio and local television, now known as the Community Media Association after a conference which I attended and spoke at last week in Edinburgh. The association has become an umbrella organisation for several bodies concerned with small-scale broadcasting. Those bodies provide local services and often information, are usually non-commercial in nature and serve a clearly defined small geographic area or part of a large urban conurbation. They provide a much needed community resource.

The sector might be forgiven for seeing itself permanently cast in the biblical role of Lazarus, condemned to pick up the crumbs from the rich man's table. However, it is far too valuable a resource to our society for that and is destined to play a clear role in this country. A party such as ours, dedicated to the inclusion of all our communities in our plans for society, must afford it some recognition. I see no other reason, other than a slight oversight, why there should not be specific reference somewhere in the Bill to the needs of small-scale broadcasters.

Spectrum pricing will, after all, raise resources. I take it that it is not intended that those resources should be raised from small-scale operators as their needs must be met in areas where there is tremendous commercial competition for the bigger chunks of spectrum that are needed for larger services. It is good that we are to raise that money. The question remains whether a little of it could filter through to the worthwhile people on whose behalf I am speaking this evening. I am sure that I shall get a sympathetic hearing, if not a completely positive response, from my hon. Friends on the Front Bench.

May I outline the aims of the community media charter, as they could be usefully incorporated into our thinking? I shall not quote the charter in its entirety as it is rather long, but it says:

> "To promote the right to communicate, to assist the free flow of information and opinions, to encourage creative expression and to contribute to the democratic process and a pluralistic society;

> To provide access to training, production and distribution facilities, to encourage local creative talent, to foster local traditions, and to provide services for the benefit, entertainment, education and development of their audience;
>
> To seek to have their ownership representative of local geographically recognisable communities or of communities of common interest;
>
> To be editorially independent of government, commercial and religious institutions and political parties in determining their programming policy;
>
> To provide a right of access to minority and marginalised groups and to promote and protect cultural and linguistic diversity;
>
> To honestly inform their audience on the basis of information drawn from a variety of sources and to provide a right of reply to any person or organisation subject to serious misrepresentation;
>
> To be established as organisations which are not run with a view to profit and to ensure their independence by being financed from a variety of sources"—

one of which is before us today—

> "To recognise and respect the contribution of volunteers, to recognise the right of paid workers to join trade unions and to provide satisfactory working conditions for both;
>
> To operate management, programming and employment practices which oppose discrimination".

It is a worthy charter which the whole House should be prepared to support. Its aims should, on consideration, receive at least a nod from Ministers, if not definite inclusion in this small Bill. The hundreds of groups in all our constituencies, which are involved in trying to develop those worthwhile new services, would welcome some reference to it.

As I said earlier, I welcome the Bill. I trust that, in the light-hearted way in which I have tried to deliver this speech, I may have imparted a little more learning to the hon. Members who are left on the Opposition Benches. I wish my hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench every success in the progress of this measure.

6.46 pm

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall). Much of what I wanted to say has been said in one way or another, which is almost inevitable. This relatively short Bill, which will have a profound effect on people during the next few decades, is broadly welcomed by the Liberal Democrats, if not others. We have a few concerns, however, which I shall outline in a moment.

There can be no doubt that the management of the radio spectrum and encouragement of its efficient use are vital to the future of communications, particularly as the resource is clearly under considerable pressure due to the enormous expansion of radio wave usage in recent years. Technological advances in the radio spectrum have increased its availability, and services are now provided at much higher frequencies, which has increased the usable spectrum. Even so, demand continues to exceed availability.

We recognise, therefore, the imperative to improve the management and efficiency of the radio spectrum, and we accept that changes to the present regulatory system, which is based on the administrative costs of managing the spectrum and not on its economic value, are a realistic way forward. We accept that, because charging has not been related to value, a distortion in demand has been caused, with users having no real incentive to use the spectrum to which they currently have access in the most efficient way.

The need to increase the availability of spectrum and use it more efficiently is overwhelming. We accept the essential provision of the Bill, which changes the method of charging from one based on cost to a more economic value, even if it raises more money, which will make the Treasury happy.

The Bill's other main provision gives the power to auction some licences. We have concerns about that, some of which have already been raised today. I accept that assurances have been given that auctions will not be applied to existing operators, at least not during the period of their current operational licences, but we are concerned about the principle of auctions for future allocations of spectrum.

Most hon. Members will remember the experience of the auction process in the television sector in the recent past. Although there was a quality threshold before companies were even allowed to enter the auction process, it clearly favoured those with the greatest financial muscle. Some bidders paid far too much, and others acquired their licences for next to nothing. That could happen again, and if it did, it would be less than positive for consumers.

There are always dangers in the auction process when it is used in a new marketplace, and one where bidders are conscious of the need to retain their market share or obtain new market share. There is an obvious danger that spectrum will be purchased not only by those wishing to use it, but by those wishing to have it as an investment in a resource with clear scarcity value. They may want to retain their allocation and sell it at a profit. That, surely, is not the object of the exercise.

It remains far from clear what is proposed for the existing licences if they are not to be exposed to the auction process, and whether and how those licences will be brought into line with the new charges. If they are not, there will be a major distortion in the market, which will probably favour those who were in first.

Therefore, one of the most important details will be the way in which competition is to be established between those who already hold spectrum and those who wish to enter this new marketplace. That is particularly important for the new companies, of which there are quite a few, which are developing the leading-edge technologies, such as fixed radio access. Uncertainty about the future costs could severely deter new capital investment for the development of new services, so it is vital that those companies know exactly what they are letting themselves in for in the auction process.

It is essential to control the on-selling of licences, if that is possible—perhaps it will not be possible—to avoid the creation of a secondary market, which is often almost entirely unregulated, at least at the beginning. Subsequent attempts to regulate it would not meet with much success.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Mr. Godman) mentioned the use of radios by fishermen. Perhaps we can learn lessons from the fishing quota licences. The debacle that was caused in our fishing industry should make us mindful of the consequence of creating marketplace conditions for a national asset, which can then be exploited by commercial concerns in a secondary marketplace.

Another lesson often learnt far too late is the need to consult industry before far-reaching legislation is enacted. I am delighted to hear of the new advisory board that is to be set up. I am sure that that will be welcomed by the industry as a whole, which will have to operate within the new legislative environment. That is essential if we are to get the efficient use of the spectrum to deliver the commercial and public benefits to all of us. Broad agreement on all aspects will be necessary, and the industry must be aware of Government intentions.

I believe that the industry broadly agrees with the measures in the Bill. Although it may not be delighted at having to pay more charges, the industry will recognise that it is a sensible way forward. Future policy developments must be subject to the proper consultation.

The interests of the consumer must be given due weight. The Government's review of utility regulation will closely examine consumer representation. The competition Bill will give new rights to consumers and organisations representing consumers. In the light of measures to enshrine consumer interests within telecom regulation, it seems a little odd that they are being overlooked in the regulation of the radio spectrum. Perhaps that aspect could be developed.

Mr. Fallon: Does that mean that the hon. Gentleman would welcome an amendment in Committee to include in clause 2 specific reference to consumer interests?

Mr. Breed: That is one of the matters that we shall raise in Committee. It is important that consumer interests are properly represented. I shall certainly seek some amendment in Committee.

On such a technical subject, it is sensible that independent advice through a statutory requirement for consultation should be incorporated in the Bill at the outset. Perhaps the Government will consider that slight tweak.

In view of the transparency of the auction and charging process, which will be vital if it is to receive the support of industry, it will surely be necessary to ensure that the current culture of secrecy in the Radiocommunications Agency is changed to a culture of greater openness. I recognise that, because of the Ministry of Defence involvement, there has been a culture of secrecy, but I am not sure that that can continue if people are expected to operate in an auction process in a more transparent environment.

Sensible measures properly to manage the nation's asset, together with realistic charges based on value rather than cost, should not become the open-ended tax-raising measure, concern about which dominated the early part of the debate. The measure could be milked by successive Chancellors as a cash cow, but I do not believe that that is the Government's intention.

If licences are to cost more, and the aim is to increase efficiency, a clear link should be established between increases in cost and the improved efficiency of the spectrum. That could be written into the Bill. It would provide a mechanism to reinforce what the Minister said, and creating a link between increased efficiency and increased cost would ensure that in future money is not raised solely for tax purposes. If that is not done, it could leave the door open to abuse of the powers by increasing licence charges without commensurate improvement in the management of the spectrum.

The length of the Bill is no indication of its likely consequences for the country. Although they have considerable merit and are broadly supported by the industry, and by Liberal Democrats, important points of detail are raised and must be tackled. I have raised some of those and intend to pursue them in Committee. At this stage, however, I am delighted to assure the Minister of our support for the Bill.

6.57 pm

Ms Linda Perham (Ilford, North): My reason for speaking in the debate is to raise the concerns of many of my constituents in Ilford, North who are licensed taxi drivers and who work on radio taxi circuits. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for referring in his opening remarks to the importance of radio to the taxi industry.

I have spoken to the Joint Radio Taxicab Association, the trade body that represents London's five licensed radio taxi circuits—Computer Cab, Radio Taxis, Dial-a-Cab, Datacab and Harrow Radio Taxis. I am grateful for the association's advice.

It is difficult to appreciate the accelerating pace at which the taxi industry is developing. One hundred years ago, in August 1897, the London Electric Cab company of Juxton street, Lambeth, began operating in the west end and City with 12 environmentally friendly electric cabs, which could be hired for the day for 25 shillings. That was probably a lot of money then. Fifty years ago this year, the last horse-cab driver handed in his licence. In that same year, 1947—in which I was born—the first radio cab service in Great Britain began operating in Cambridge, which is now represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), who sits next to me.

The radio taxi industry at present employs more than 6,500 licensed taxi drivers and more than 550 administrative staff. It has an annual turnover of more than £100 million and has invested more than £23 million in the past three years—following consultation with the Radiocommunications Agency—in updating its radio systems. That investment means that taxi orders are now dispatched by data rather than voice control, which has provided great efficiency gains in the spectrum that taxis utilise.

Issues affecting this sector of the radiocommunications industry were not raised during the passage of the Bill in the other place, so I am pleased to have the opportunity to highlight some of them now. With this legislation, the Government are rightly seeking to introduce effective management and fair pricing of the radio spectrum. As the Minister said, effective management of the finite spectrum resource is essential if growth and innovation are to be sustained. I congratulate the Government on the reassurances that they have provided already about their intentions regarding fees, auctions and security of tenure for small and medium-sized businesses that already use spectrum frequencies.

Members of the Joint Radio Taxicab Association are grateful for the open and constructive way in which officials and Ministers have approached those issues during their consultations. They are particularly reassured that the proposed fee increases to be incurred by businesses, such as taxi firms, will be modest and subject to an industry consultation exercise. I welcome that. The industry is also reassured that there are no proposals to require existing licensees to enter into auctions for the right to continue to provide their current services within their existing spectrum allocation.

[Ms Linda Perham]

I shall now address the principal change in the legislation: spectrum pricing will be charged on its economic value to the holder rather than on administrative cost, as occurs under current provision. The new legislation will permit the Secretary of State to apply pricing differentials to the allocation of spectrum frequencies. As I understand it, spectrum fees will be set having regard to the amount of spectrum bandwidth occupied, the location where the frequencies are to be used, whether the frequencies are to be exclusive to a single user or shared, and according to market demand.

While that is a sensible move, which will no doubt encourage many users to use the spectrum more efficiently, it seems to me that we should take the final step to ensure optimum usage of frequencies by monitoring the efficiency of spectrum usage and by encouraging the most efficient users of spectrum in some way. I urge the Secretary of State to consider utilising, or adding to, the powers in the Bill so that she may monitor the efficient usage of frequencies that are already possessed. When a company bids for further frequencies, the application could be judged not just on price, but on the applicant's record of using the spectrum allocation efficiently.

A system that relies on price alone to promote efficiency will inevitably have certain flaws. Under such a system, the cost of efficiency is left to the individual company to decide. The company with the ability to absorb or pass on any increased licensing costs will have no real incentive to become a more efficient channel user. Indeed, the exclusivity of a channel, rather than the cost, may be the key element for the user.

There is also a danger that a company will overstretch when purchasing its spectrum capacity and not have sufficient resources to invest in the technology necessary for managing the spectrum well. Such situations—for reasons of strategy, ineptitude or a lack of resources—will have a major detrimental effect on the growth of successful, efficient companies, including radio taxi circuit members, who have just spent more than £20 million moving from voice to data dispatch of taxi orders.

If the Government are to prevent such problems, there must be a process for assessing spectrum usage. I understand that the technology exists to undertake that kind of exercise. The Radiocommunications Agency is able to monitor channel occupancy regularly, and therefore remove exclusive spectrum assignments from users who do not meet designated usage criteria. I believe that that is neither a difficult nor an expensive activity to undertake, and the costs of such an exercise could be built into the fees of the industries that would benefit from promoting efficiency. I look forward to hearing the Government's view about that suggestion.

I am concerned that, as demand for taxi services grows, radio taxi circuits—which have spent millions improving their spectral efficiency—will be outbid for extra spectrum space by companies that may have more funds to spend, but not nearly such a good record in using their spectrum allocation efficiently; or that the necessary frequencies will not be available because other companies are using their allocations inefficiently.

There is little doubt that demand for the services of radio taxi companies will continue to increase. The taxi is set to play a vital role in the Government's proposals to develop an integrated transport policy for London. The taxi provides a realistic alternative to the private car in London, and it fills gaps in services that public transport cannot meet. Most importantly, more than 95 per cent. of taxis on the radio circuits are already wheelchair-accessible. That provides a public transport service option for disabled people that most bus, train and tube services cannot match.

I am sure that hon. Members will agree that London is rightly renowned, nationally and worldwide, for the high vehicle and service standards provided by our licensed taxi trade. I would welcome a reassurance from the Minister that the Government recognise the vital public service and transport role that taxi companies provide, and that this factor will always be taken into account when applying the provisions of the Bill.

7.6 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): During my time at the Department of Trade and Industry more than a decade ago, I was involved occasionally in radio matters. In those days, we were engaged in the business of trying to shut down pirate radio stations—so I am rather pleased that we have moved to a more liberal frame of mind. That is due largely to Conservative Governments, and we are now beginning to see some of the market and commercial benefits to be derived from a more liberal telecommunications field.

There is something slightly curious about the way in which Ministers and Labour Back Benchers have approached the question of manifestos in terms of the Bill. I have often heard Labour Members insist that they must proceed quickly with a course of action because they have a mandate through their manifesto. They imply that it is rather presumptuous of Conservative Members to seek to question, criticise or impede the progress of legislation when the Government are proceeding in accordance with their manifesto mandate. Yet, this evening, Labour Members say that we must proceed quickly and that Conservative Members must not offer constructive criticism or question the legislation because it was part of the Conservative manifesto. I am struck by the sense of irony and the role reversal—perhaps that will develop further as the evening progresses.

The Labour manifesto did not cover this measure—the Labour party did not see fit to tell the electorate that it proposed to introduce legislation in this area so soon after the election. None the less, it has proceeded. Having chosen to introduce the Bill, we must examine whether the Government have addressed all the issues arising from it, not so much as a point of principle but as a point of practice. Many such matters were not addressed adequately in the Minister's introductory speech or in his responses to interventions.

I begin with the view that we should have an efficient method of allocating the radio spectrum, and that markets generally are an efficient method of resource allocation. However, the method of pricing and the extent and character of the marketplace that it created are of the essence in determining whether it remains an efficient method of allocating spectrum. I shall raise two points in relation to this before moving on to a number of points of detail.

If a purchaser has bought spectrum but is unable effectively to use it during the life of the licence, will they be able to assign it, and what freedoms of use would be attached were they to do so? Could a secondary market be created? If it could, I suspect that we could expect the economic efficiency of spectrum allocation to be maximised. If not, we run the risk of under-utilisation or under-investment by licence holders, who may not, in the later stages of the life of their licence, be the operators at the cutting edge of technology or commercial development.

Secondly, how long will the licences last? Once a licence is sold, the character of market pressure to improve spectrum utilisation for a particular operator changes. Licence holders will become aware, rightly, of the need to secure maximum value from their use of the spectrum over the licence period, but they will also be aware that alternative users will be able to bid in due course to take over that spectrum. Over the life of a licence, therefore, the balance of these considerations will shift from the former to the latter, reducing in some cases the potential and returns from new investment. Short-term licences, therefore, hold the risk of under-investment by licence holders. Longer licences run the risk of creating barriers to market entry for new and innovative operators. That is why we should look for licences of a realistic length, but—I emphasise but—with real scope to assign the spectrum to others in a secondary market.

That brings me to a related point. The Government have stressed that existing licensees will not be required to enter an auction—indeed, the Minister reiterated this in his opening speech—for the right to continue to provide their current services within their existing spectrum allocation. Fair as that may seem, we have to recognise that, for the life of existing licences—and some of them are quite lengthy—there will be a clear market benefit to existing licensees, and, depending on the cost to new operators of the spectrum they acquire, the latter could be at a significant market disadvantage.

That may be sufficient in some circumstances to deter new entrants to the marketplace and hence frustrate the objectives of the legislation in stimulating new commercial and technological developments. It is therefore very important that, in their licensing of spectrum use for new—I emphasise new—generation services, especially third generation mobile telephony, to which the Minister referred, existing and new operators should, so far as possible, be required to bid for spectrum use for this purpose on an equivalent basis.

There are a number of specific matters on which I should be grateful if the Minister would comment when she replies. First, will the Government undertake to protect the interests of radio astronomy, such as the Mullard radio astronomy observatory in my constituency, which provides valuable scientific information and research? The efficient use of radio spectrum could assist the process of moving from analogue to digital. What does the Minister believe the consequences of the Bill will be in that respect?

Thirdly, my right hon. and hon. Friends have rightly said this is a substantial revenue-raising measure. Although I would not dispute the Minister's contention that hypothecation directly should not arise, industry should reasonably look for a commitment that revenue raising is not the principal purpose of the measure, and that therefore, when the opportunity arises, corresponding reductions in business costs should occur elsewhere, or there should be an expectation that the stimulation of technological and commercial support to industry from the Department of Trade and Industry should reflect the fact that industry is making a further significant contribution to Government revenues in this area. I see no evidence of that at the moment from the Government; merely the smile on the Treasury's Cheshire cat.

Fourthly, what measures do the Government propose to take to frustrate collusion at auctions for spectrum? In that area, some of the experience in the United States was unhappy. The Government would need to combat that possibility.

Fifthly, in an intervention, I referred to clause 3 and asked what further matters the Secretary of State would take into account when determining to whom licences would be given at an action. In subsequent debate, we have heard from Liberal Democrat Members and Labour Members that consumer and other interests are being pressed on Ministers as relevant to the decision whether to give a licence to a particular bidder at auction, and that it should not simply be the highest bidder.

We need to know—if not on Second Reading, in Committee—what matters will be specified and under what circumstances Ministers would regard it as right not to award a licence to the highest bidder at an auction. I reiterate a point made, rightly, by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) relating to the cost to the public sector. There are significant uses of radio spectrum in the public sector. The public sector will be required to meet the costs. We need to know what the costs will be. How will they be met? What will be the implications for public services?

I was glad to hear my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) set the Bill in its proper context. Where the Government have picked up on the policies of the previous Government, they have so far added little, and lost something in translation.

Dr. Palmer: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with his Front-Bench colleague that the Conservative policy in this area was a mistake?

Mr. Lansley: When the hon. Gentleman comes to look at it, he will see that my right hon. Friend was not saying that the previous Government's policy had been a mistake. He simply said that he was sceptical—and always had been—of the policy of spectrum pricing. The point that I am making is that the Government have chosen to go down this route, but we need to look very carefully at the implementation of spectrum pricing. The questions that I have raised would be very much in the minds of my right hon. and hon. Friends, and until they are resolved, it would not be right to proceed with the legislation in the way proposed.

As I understand it, it was not my right hon. Friends' intention before the election to proceed with the Bill in this form at this time. They undertook an initial consultation, and there may well have been issues that would have arisen in response to consultation and on reflection after the election which would have led to different conclusions in relation to legislation. We have to explore legislation, and that is the purpose of this debate and the subsequent Standing Committee.

The President of the Board of Trade has somewhat underwhelmed industry, not least by her published document on competitiveness, which was a shallow and

[Mr. Lansley]

insubstantial effort in comparison with the competitiveness White Papers and subsequent measures of her predecessors. The Minister of State, like his colleagues at the DTI, promises much but so far has delivered little. What they have done they largely owe to their predecessors, as in the Bill. No doubt they have been distracted by the troubles into which the Department has fallen, almost from day one. However, the time is fast approaching when business will say, "Where's the beef?"

Valuable as the Bill may be, Ministers will not be able to point to it for an answer. If they fail to flesh out the detail adequately, even some of the potential benefits of this measure, for the development of an important industry, which undeniably exist, may be lost.

7.19 pm

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): I shall talk about the importance of the Bill, converging technologies and some of the new entrants that will result from the Bill. There is widespread support for the measure, and the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) has demonstrated that there is widespread support among Conservatives for the principles of spectrum management. I was surprised by the shadow Secretary of State's comments, but he would not recognise widespread support if it was in front of him.

Before I came to the House, I spent 20 years in information technology as an assistant analyst designing systems. The United Kingdom was able to achieve a lead in that technology despite legislation and not because of it. A great deal has been achieved because those involved have been able to get round regulations and not because of Government support. Too often, innovations and new technologies are introduced in this country that run foul of the way in which it is organised. The procedures of this place result in laws that prevent innovation and thereby prevent us from moving forward. It is incredible that we achieve so much despite the restrictions that are in place.

I am pleased that the Bill will increase flexibility. If some of the restrictions that have been advocated are put in place, new technologies that we shall see being introduced in the next century will not be able to use the radio spectrum.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) talked about Germany and France and our lead over them, but they are not the only countries in Europe. The Nordic countries also have a lead. Finland, for example, has 98 per cent. usage of mobile phones. Surely we have something to learn from the innovations of Nordic countries, with public sector companies competing with other public sector companies as well as with private sector companies. The dynamic market that has been created has led to a 39 per cent. use of the internet, for example. There are many lessons that we can learn so that the lead and leading-edge technologies that we have developed can remain in place.

The Nordic countries have learnt that outdated dogma, from wherever it comes, is a barrier to innovation. I am pleased that the Bill does not rely on that dogma.

There will be a convergence of technologies. We will not be talking about only radio, television or cable. I can already e-mail via my digital phone, and it will not be long before that and other technologies improve, providing access to many more people.

There will not merely be a convergence of technology but a mix-and-match approach. The individual will be able to use part wireless, part cable and part satellite technology all in one transaction. Apart from convergence, we should talk about the appropriateness of technology to enable someone in a rural area to use appropriate technology in the same way as those who live in inner-city conurbations. It is important that we build in flexibility so that licences allow for mix and match. We should not push people down a particular route. A problem of the past is that we have seen things in isolation and not as ways of communicating. Technology has been perceived as a way of sending a message by means of a certain medium and it is important that in future we see things in the round.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms) talked about some of the technologies to which I intended to refer. I know, of course, that it is not compulsory in the Chamber not to repeat ourselves, but I shall be abstemious and not repeat some of my hon. Friend's remarks. There will be new technologies, and I am not talking about third generation mobile telephony, which is already here and being developed. There will be new technologies that go beyond that and we must not make short-sighted mistakes. Instead, we must consider allowing new entrants to use wireless in the century ahead. It will be a mistake to confine ourselves to what we already know about.

New technologies will be introduced, and the Bill must provide for new entrants. We must not erect barriers against technologies that we do not yet know about. Some of those who have contributed to the debate seemed to be suggesting that we should put in place barriers based on current technology instead of looking to the future.

I welcome clause 5 and the giving of grants for future research. It is important that we provide support for research in the early days. All too often, however, we have put money into research and stopped before that research can lead to products. It is important that money is made available for new companies that are setting up new technologies. In the early days when things are a struggle, when banks do not want to know and when sufficient capital is not available, the Government should provide support.

When I read about auctions back in June, I thought, "My God, here we go again. Have we learnt nothing from the television debacle and experience in the United States?" I have been reassured by comments made in the other place and by those of my hon. Friend the Minister this afternoon.

It is important that our approach is selective and appropriate and not one that is used for anything and everything. Conservative Members seem not to recognise that it is appropriate in some circumstances to use auctions. At the same time, I think that it would be inappropriate to use them in every circumstance.

I am pleased that the Minister gave reassurance to existing companies based on the investment that they have already made. He has said that they will not be subject to auctions for existing services. It is an important message which needs repeating. We are talking not of a tax but of the management of the spectrum.

My experience of the Ministry of Defence is that it is not likely to give up the bands that it already has. A small dose of commercial reality would be especially appropriate for the MOD.

We need to be aware of what happens in terms of costs and benefits when new technologies are introduced. It has been said that costs will be passed on to the consumer. However, new technologies rapidly give value to the consumer, and prices fall quickly. The new technologies that will be introduced by means of the Bill will be no different.

There has been a good deal of consultation with industry, but I make the plea that practitioners are also involved. We should not confine ourselves to company directors. It is important that we talk to those who are developing technology and who are involved at the sharp end, who will maintain our leading edge.

Consultation must have appropriate time scales. Companies should know in advance what the issues are and what they must plan for. Consultation has too often taken place at an inappropriate time. It has either been too far in advance and nothing has happened or it has been far too quick and no one has had time to plan. We must ensure that we get the balance right.

I accept that there are some concerns that should be expressed in Committee, but I accept that the Bill is an important measure which will set us up for the next century, ensuring that we maintain the leading edge that has been developed over the past century.

7.28 pm

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I support the general principles that are set out in the Bill, which represent a useful step forward. They have been described fluently by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White) and by many others.

I welcome the generally high standard of debate. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have advanced serious arguments. I should perhaps exempt the absent shadow Secretary of State, who made up for seriousness with a particularly entertaining speech. I enjoyed his description of the history of Conservative policy in the area covered by the Bill. Apparently, there was a shining light during the time when he was last responsible for these matters, followed by a dark tunnel leading all the way to the general election, including the drafting of the Conservative party manifesto. A new light has now returned and we can bask in it.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), the shadow Secretary of State, criticised my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for not being present throughout the debate. Having said that, he immediately disappeared.

I shall introduce a note of dissent in the consensus that appears to rule between the two Front Benches and the Liberal Democrats. I hesitate to do that, because new Members have been told that our maiden speeches should be non-controversial, and although this is my second speech, I have not yet got used to the idea of being controversial. There seems to be a broad consensus between all the parties that fee increases should be made only as far as is necessary for spectrum management. The Conservative party wants that principle to be established, but it does not trust us to keep to it. The Labour and Liberal Democrat Front-Bench teams want to stick to it.

That reminds me of the first experiments under the late President Leonid Brezhnev. He started to introduce market principles into the Soviet economy. He said, "We're not actually going to introduce profit or make money. We're just trying to introduce small reforms that will help with bottlenecks in the market. Relax comrades, nothing will happen." He was right; nothing did happen.

There are two problems with that self-denying ordinance: it is undesirable in principle and illusory in practice. I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I have one of these machines in my hand, but it is switched off. I brought it in to show that I am not opposed in principle to mobile telephones. When I see people in the street speaking into mobile telephones, I do not react with horror like most people do. I am pleased that the British people are learning to do two things at once and increasing the gross national product.

Nevertheless, it would be idle to pretend that companies, such as Vodafone and Agent Orange or whatever it calls itself, are desperately short of money and are threatened by the smallest increase in the cost of wavelengths, especially as it may be 20 years before they pay it.

Given the priorities that the Labour Government have set in education, unemployment reduction and health, we should take more seriously the need to raise revenue from appropriate areas. Wavelengths are currently general public property, so if we are unable to raise revenue from that area, where should we do so?

The European directive seems to put up a barrier to that. It says:

> "Member States may set fees at a level higher than cost recovery only where this is justified to ensure the optimal use of scarce resources (such as radio spectrum)."

All of us who have worked in business know that it does not happen like that. If there is a scarce resource, either the fees are set at the market level, or the attempt to raise fees to clear the market will not work. Each company will calculate the cost to it of entering this market. It will consider the fees that we set, and will take part in the auction, application or whatever procedure we require to the point where it makes sense in the market in marginal terms. When we say that we will use this measure only for the purpose of spectrum management when the European Union says that we should use it only for that purpose, we are either limiting ourselves to the extent that we will fail in spectrum management, or deluding ourselves and, in practice, we will have to put up prices to the market level to get an orderly market. Ministers should be willing to accept that and regard it as a natural part of Labour Government policy.

The waveband spectrum belongs to the British people, and they should get a fair price for it, which is what we would expect in any other commercial transaction not involving destitute groups. I reiterate that Vodafone and Orange are not destitute groups: they are happy to work in the market on this basis.

It could be argued that that creates an undesirable precedent, but there is already the precedent of the oil industry. When the oil industry started in the North sea, entrance costs were very low. Consequently, the early period of exploitation of North sea oil was characterised by extraordinarily high levels of profit. Successive Governments raised the level of revenue that they obtained from levies on North sea oil because they felt that it was reasonable for such a collective asset to produce a reasonable return for the British Government.

[Dr. Nick Palmer]

I believe that we should not be apologetic. We should accept that the Government would be right to charge what the wavebands are worth. I hope that in the years to come they will choose to do so.

7.35 pm

Mr. Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): I represent a rural and fishing constituency. The Bill commends itself to many people in my constituency, as it affects their life style and their safety. They will be staggered that the party that they formerly supported has turned its face against the provision in its manifesto to widen the management of radio spectrum. I am fairly firm on this point, because the effectiveness of the police force in North Yorkshire suffered as a consequence of the narrowing and so-called freeing up that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) instigated when he had his time at the Department of Trade and Industry. The Leader of the Opposition represents a constituency in North Yorkshire, so he knows what happened, even if the right hon. Member for Wokingham does not.

I have talked to policemen on the beat in the streets of Scarborough, Whitby and in the vast rural areas. Police constables often carry their own Vodafone mobile phones in their pockets, because as a consequence of the measures that were instigated by the previous Government, the radio system used by the North Yorkshire police force is outdated and ineffective, and about 40 per cent. of my constituency is a radio-free zone. That would probably commend itself to some of my colleagues on the Front Bench, particularly if it involved receiving radio signals through pagers or through radio telephones.

Like other hon. Members, I procured a digital telephone expecting to receive 95 per cent. coverage in my area, but when I am on my patch I have difficulty receiving appropriate communications. I am no different from the vast majority of people who live in those rural areas and work in those fishing communities. My constituents believe that this measure will afford them opportunities to get better access to communications.

I hope that the right hon. Member for Wokingham will explain later why he set his face so firmly against the previous Government's clear manifesto commitment. It was offered to my constituents as a fairly significant plank of their policy that affected people's life styles and safety.

I shall never forget the story told to me by a farmer in one of the dales, who had had an accident. He was in his tractor, on his own, and had he not been able to use a mobile telephone to gain access to the emergency services—which, incidentally, took more than 40 minutes to reach him—he probably would have lost his life. I believe that the Bill offers the possibility of innovation on the part of the industry, and thus offers life-saving measures to many of my constituents.

I ask the Minister to give serious consideration to a point that was made by the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) about the fishing industry. Unlike some earlier speakers who may have found reasons for hilarity in that industry, I firmly believe that it is important for us to review the licensing charges presented to fishermen. I can confirm that they tend to use mobile phones more often than radios to telephone their homes, for instance, and that they use their radios only in emergencies—in circumstances of life and death. I hope that we will give due consideration to that in Committee.

As for the rural community, I understand from the research that I undertook in preparation for my speech that the National Farmers Union was one of the organisations that were consulted about the Bill. I believe that the NFU speaks for the agricultural community in supporting the Bill—and that is why I think that it was right that the previous Government made a commitment to the rural communities in their manifesto, saying that they would ensure that communications would be opened up for them.

Often, the size of the market is the reason why rural communities do not have access to the telecommunications market in the more restricted areas in which they live. I certainly believe in the idea of community, and I know that my constituents do. I believe that measures that will allow small-scale radio operators to enter the market for the first time, and to afford rural communities life-and-death safety procedures, will be beneficial.

Before I became a Member of Parliament, I was a civil engineer. I am a chartered civil engineer. Unlike some earlier speakers, I am not particularly expert in any electrical or even mechanical procedures, but I am a user: I have had to use the devices that we are discussing when doing my job out in the construction industry. I see tremendous advantages for the public utilities—the gas, electricity and water companies—and, indeed, for their customers. They will have access to services when there is an emergency, and that will have a direct result on life styles.

Let me emphasise a point that has come across in the debate. I believe that I was elected, rather than the last Conservative Member of Parliament for Scarborough, because I presented a programme that tried to solve problems rather than making larger problems. I believe that I was elected because I represented a party that spoke up for the whole British community, not just for sectional interests. I also believe that we now have a Government who try to represent all the British people, and all the people in my constituency of Scarborough and Whitby. The Bill was ready to be debated—thanks, ironically, to the work of the previous Government—but the fact that it has been presented says loud and clear to my constituents that the new Government are serious about benefiting their life styles.

Unlike Conservative Members, I believe that there is a possibility of our bringing real advantage and benefit to the whole British community, not just to sectional interests. I believe that the Bill firmly shows that the Labour party speaks for the whole of that community, not just for the narrow, sectional, urban and suburban interests that we heard represented earlier this evening.

7.44 pm

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): The Bill exemplifies how fast technological change has been taking place, and the speed with which it has been absorbed into everyday use in society. Looking at the statistics involved in radiocommunication, anyone would think that, with 100 billion cycles per second to allocate, the radio spectrum could be treated almost like air, free to everyone. Of course, it is not: not all parts of the spectrum can be used for all purposes. When there are more than 30 billion cycles per second, the spectrum cannot be used much more than for transmissions from the couch for the television, and the majority of users—or, at least, significant users—use less than that.

Equally, the lower-range frequencies will spread all over Europe and, indeed, the world. They are also in need of regulation, because there will be interference. Then there is the fixed use of radio astronomy, which has already been mentioned. Radio astronomers cannot pick the spectrum in which a particular star will radiate, and we would not want the local taxi service to blot out the latest development in cosmology. Those are all good reasons why the frequencies should be well regulated.

The allocation of frequencies is therefore far more complicated than it appears at first sight. That was recognised in the Wireless Telegraphy Acts 1904 and 1949, and in the provision of the Radiocommunications Agency to regulate such matters. Since then, however, there has been a huge increase in the number of radio devices. I am not thinking just of the communications devices of which we all know; as well as mobile telephones, there are devices connected with taxis and television. Radio communciations has had a huge impact on the public services, and the speed with which they can reach the sites of accidents and emergencies where police, ambulances or the fire brigade are called. Without regulation, some of the spectrum would be overcrowded and one user would interfere with another. Sometimes the effect would be trivial, but potentially it could be tragic.

The original concept of allocation reflected the relative freedom that appeared to be there in the spectrum. It was a standing charge for anyone who wanted a licence, and there was therefore no incentive to economise on the way in which the licence was operated, and the way in which bands could be used—pretty liberally. There was no reason why they should not have been given that apparent freedom. The huge increase in the use of devices needing radio frequencies, however, has changed all that, and the change is now widely recognised. It has been widely recognised in the almost unanimous approval of this measure in the consultation that took place; it was even recognised by the previous Government, who did not always recognise wisdom when it was in front of them; and users generally will support the measure and consider it necessary.

The Bill will not be an impediment to those who operate now. The clauses make it clear that most current users will experience reduced charges, and that to others the increase will be hardly noticeable. It has been quoted as 20p per taxi per week, and 15p per mobile phone per week. Hardly anyone will notice such an increase, and along with the changes will come greater security for people using such devices.

This is not a revenue-raising Bill, but an enabling measure. The intention is to promote rational and efficient use of radio spectrum. We can thereby expect a burgeoning of the jobs that are associated with radio-based industries. It is estimated that 400,000 jobs are already associated with those industries and that that will expand by 1,000 a week.

There have been times when technological development has been frustrated because the law, social circumstances or administration frustrated it. They put too tight a rein around the development. The Bill is intended to avoid that. It is intended to give the tremendous drive for technological development in this sector an open space that is properly regulated and governed and in which boundaries are set and people can compete in a civilised way.

The Bill is worthy of support on all those counts and everyone who has considered it and the situation it represents appears to support it. However, it also exemplifies the way in which a democratic Government who are in tune with the times and determined to modernise can bring this country up to date and allow conditions for technological innovation to flourish.

7.50 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): I congratulate all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate, whether voluntarily or not. In particular, I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) and for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) for their contributions. I also welcome the contribution by the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) and look forward to exploring with him some of the issues to which he has rightly drawn attention—in particular, the failure of clause 2 to recognise consumer interests adequately.

We have had a useful debate. The Bill has become clearer and clearer as the evening has worn on. Conservative Members accept the principle that the spectrum should be managed properly and in such a way as to encourage the development of new services. That is what we did successfully in government. That is what my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) did when he was a Minister in the Department. If there is a problem of crowding on the spectrum, it is a problem of success, which was created by the last Conservative Government.

We do not accept the Bill, partly because it is poorly drafted and partly because it gives the Secretary of State significant powers over one of our most successful industries. It taxes those industries arbitrarily and in an indiscriminate way, and it leaves unclear the whole question of the various taxing mechanisms—the so-called administrative pricing under clause 2 and the use of auctions under clause 3.

I have said that the industry is going to be treated unfairly and in an unworkable way. There is no better illustration of that than the Bill's complete failure to address the problem of international satellite operators, who will not pay United Kingdom spectrum charges, who do not pay UK company taxes and who are outside UK telecommunications regulations. The Minister will be hard pressed to explain why our operators should be taxed twice over—first, under normal fiscal policy and again under his regime—and also regulated, and then be told that they are to share that access with operators who are untaxed and entirely unregulated.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House accept that the essential emergency services—not just gas, electricity and water, but national health service trusts, for

[Mr. Michael Fallon]

example—should be given access to the spectrum. We have received various assurances about the charging regime that might apply to them. The point is that that access must be guaranteed. Emergency services cannot be trifled with. They must have access to the amount of spectrum that they require. Warm words will not suffice and did not suffice in the other place. I give Ministers notice that in Committee we shall seek to place in the Bill guarantees in regard to access for our emergency services.

There are two principal pricing mechanisms in the Bill. The first, under clause 2, is ingeniously described as "administrative pricing". Conservative Members will savour that phrase constantly over the next few months. We call it taxation and it might have been to the Minister's or the parliamentary draftsman's credit if they had recognised taxation for what it is and been honest enough to spell it out as taxation. Clause 2 gives us serious problems, as their lordships in another place revealed.

In four specific areas, we are going to have to amend clause 2. First, the tests—the matters to which the Secretary of State must refer and shall now have regard: that amendment is useful—are deficient. As the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall has said, there is no reference to consumer interests. We shall want to put that right in Committee. I advise the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry to improve on the defence offered by her noble Friend when resisting the amendment in Committee in another place. It is simply not good enough to say that writing consumer interests into the Bill will somehow duplicate the remit of the Office of Telecommunications. That will not wash. This is taxation and there should be some regard to the consumer interest.

There is no reference either to the need to promote stability of investment. That is important in this new market of growing businesses. We shall want to examine that, too, in Committee.

Our second concern with clause 2 is that the tests are not in any sense verifiable because the Secretary of State will be the sole arbiter. Unless companies go expensively to law, it will be the Secretary of State who decides exactly how much regard she pays to each of the matters listed in subsection (2). Conservative Members would like a better test—a more independent test—and a vehicle for that lies in the new advisory group that the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry has proposed.

Conservative Members welcome the proposal to form a spectrum management advisory group, but it should not be merely at the service of the Minister. The industry will rightly require the Minister's management of the spectrum and his justification for the additional taxation to be capable of being put to the test by the spectrum management advisory group. I give him notice that we shall insist that the Secretary of State must at least pay attention to an annual report by that group commenting on the success of the management of the spectrum and seeking to ensure that users' interests are fully taken into account before the additional taxation is levied on them. We shall table amendments in Committee along those lines. I am sure that the advisory group will want to monitor and advise on the United Kingdom's position on negotiations in Europe and internationally on spectrum management.

As I said during an intervention on the Minister our third concern about clause 2 relates to the addition of the two qualifying words in subsection (1). They were added almost by sleight of hand in another place at the same time as the phrase "have regard" was made mandatory rather than discretionary. By adding those words, the Secretary of State is giving herself complete scope to have regard to any other matters that are not specified in the subsection. That is the point I was trying to get over to the Minister of State. Because of the peculiar linguistic construction of clause 2(1), the Secretary of State will be able to prescribe sums that are greater than she needs for purposes that she is not prepared to specify. That is wrong and her hand ought to be tied much more tightly in the legislation. We shall address that in Committee.

The most serious defect of clause 2 is the general ability to raise money for unspecified purposes. From a close look at the clause as a whole, it seems that additional money could be raised for any purpose whatever, quite outside the remit of telecommunications. Presumably money could be raised to suit the broad economic interest or the interests of the Treasury rather than those of the industry that the Department and its Ministers are supposed to look after. If that is not true, perhaps the Minister will explain how he has already been able to present to the House a carefully detailed compliance cost assessment—perhaps it is only for illustration—showing exactly how the first £75 million of revenue will be raised.

My hon. Friends may be interested to know that the Minister intends to raise £42 million more from personal communication networks—I declare an interest as a user of an Orange telephone—£26 million more from cellular telephone operators, £7 million more from fixed link users and so on. Perhaps in her winding-up speech the Under-Secretary of State will tell us whether that compliance cost assessment still stands—it was compiled some time ago—and whether she still intends these quite dramatic increases to be phased over only three years. Is that still the Government's thinking?

We shall certainly seek to ensure some kind of cap on the Secretary of State's taxation power. Even without the deficiencies in clause 2 we would have sought that. It is not right that under the Bill, which I understand is not a money Bill, the Secretary of State will be allowed to impose unlimited future increases on the industry simply by statutory instrument.

Mr. John M. Taylor (Solihull): I am following my hon. Friend's argument closely. Does he wish me to go all the way and conclude that because the DTI, which has always had a fairly tight budget, has been raided again and again by the Treasury, the Government are inventing some compensating form of income? Should I banish that thought? My hon. Friend is not asking me to believe that, is he?

Mr. Fallon: No, I am not. Perhaps the Department of Trade and Industry and the President of the Board of Trade are simply doing what they do best, which is to comply with any demand that is put upon them by the Treasury. Perhaps they have been told to raise a specific sum—who knows? The money raised by taxation from the new industries, which the Department ought to put back into them, will go who knows where. Perhaps it will be used to support the Mandelson dome at Greenwich. These are serious additional sums.

I shall now deal with clause 3 and the introduction of the principle of auctions or market pricing for new pieces of the spectrum. Some of the pitfalls of that approach have been well illustrated by hon. Members, and especially by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset, who has an international engagement this evening. However, I am sure that he will address those pitfalls in Committee.

Perhaps the Minister can finally give us some information. She has heard from her hon. Friends that auctions may not be best in all circumstances, or may not even be appropriate in most circumstances. Under what circumstances are auctions proposed and what is the timetable for raising the formidable sums that are described in the financial memorandum? Is there perhaps some hidden Treasury edict that £500 million or £1 billion must be raised by a particular year to bail out some emerging black hole in the Government's public expenditure plans?

Dr. Palmer: Does the Conservative party oppose all auctions? The hon. Gentleman has drawn attention to the fact that Labour might not wish to use them in all circumstances. Are there circumstances in which the hon. Gentleman would favour their use?

Mr. Fallon: We are opposed to auctions as described in the Bill for these purposes. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham said, we did not introduce the legislation. The Bill has been presented by the hon. Gentleman's Government, and it is for them to defend the use of auctions and to tell the House—because these are serious sums of public money—exactly into which financial and budget years the sums raised will be allocated. Perhaps the Minister could sketch out her thinking about when the first auctions might take place and say whether any tranches of this £1.5 billion—a mouthwatering sum to the Treasury—have to be raised and handed over to the Treasury by the end of any particular year.

There is an area in which I can help the hon. Gentleman. We have always argued that as the industry has grown and more new companies have come into it, we should always consider the extent to which licences can be made more transferable and the whole process of assignment made easier. One of the purposes of our White Paper was precisely to encourage the Radiocommunications Agency to ensure an easier and swifter transfer of licences when, for example, one business was taken over by another or any part of a business was transferred to the ownership of another company. Perhaps the Minister could tell us, before we get to auctions, what the Radiocommunications Agency will be doing to ensure that the process of transferring licences will be made easier when businesses are bought and sold.

Finally, on the question of auctions, perhaps the Minister will tell us whether work is in hand in the Department, or perhaps being commissioned by the Radiocommunications Agency, to learn from some of the experiences of auctions to which a number of hon. Members have referred. There have been some bad experiences with auctions in this area and I wonder whether any research has been commissioned and whether the Government are now learning the lessons from experience elsewhere.

The Bill is not as it is described. It is not about the management of the spectrum. It is a rather old-fashioned Bill of the kind that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I learned to recognise some time ago. This is a Bill about taxation. It is a Bill about arbitrary taxation, not least in the way in which clause 3 is drafted. The Bill is about unfair taxation, in the way that that taxation, left in the hands of the President of the Board of Trade, could operate. Saddest of all, it leaves the Department of Trade and Industry, once a great Department, simply as a bag carrier for the Treasury.

That may be a role that the President of the Board of Trade prefers—it is certainly the role that seems to come easiest to her—but it is not a role that best serves the revolution in communications businesses that we have seen. I can assure the Minister and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we shall do everything possible in Committee to improve the Bill and to ensure that it better serves the industries that it now proposes to tax.

8.11 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): I understand that other hon. Members, certainly on the Government Benches, wish to discuss this important Bill further. One reason why I wish to speak is because of the importance of radio to the UK economy. It contributed some £13 billion to our gross domestic product in 1994, and more than 400,000 jobs. Those jobs have been growing at the rate of 1,000 a week and the contribution to the economy at the rate of £1 billion a year.

The hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) made an interesting speech. I was not in the Chamber earlier, but I watched the debate with interest. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) made an extraordinary contribution. It was one of the most extraordinary outbursts that I have heard in my short time in the House from an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. He made an extraordinary attack which had nothing to do with the Bill but, as another hon. Member said, everything to do with his own rather extraordinary state in the Commons. Perhaps we should draw a veil over that. However, I commend the hon. Member for Sevenoaks for his suggestions and his apparent general support for the Bill.

That support is shared by the Federation of Communication Services, the trade body that covers those organisations affected by the Bill. There is also support from the four major mobile phone companies—Orange, Vodafone, Cellnet and Mercury. They have had every opportunity to suggest changes to the Bill, but they have not done so and we have seen general support for the Bill.

What has been requested is more consultation. I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Minister talk about the setting up of the spectrum management advisory group, adding to the consultation which is already included in clause 6. As my hon. Friend said, that clause refers to a range of consultations that will have to take place under the legislation, on top of which will be this important advisory group, giving impartial advice on strategy, allocations of the spectrum and policy. I welcome that as a way forward and a fulfilment of the new Government's pledge to listen to business and to all the interests affected by legislation.

The hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), who I understand is absent pursuing matters outside the House, made an interesting speech. In particular, he commended

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the setting up of the spectrum management advisory group. He suggested that it was important that independent people should be appointed to that group. In winding up, I hope that the Minister will support that. It should not be made up simply of the crowd currently involved, but should comprise potential newcomers, those interested in this huge new industry that will be so important to Britain. In particular, the hon. Gentleman suggested that it should comprise the new entries, the people who at the moment are planning for their future.

If it does not make the hon. Gentleman blush on reading this in *Hansard* tomorrow, I congratulate him on his excellent contribution, which showed a more significant and analytical approach than that of the right hon. Member for Wokingham.

I also strongly support the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Ms Perham). In particular, I share her concerns for the taxi industry. She may feel that that industry has a tremendous dominance in north Ilford, but I can assure her that her concerns are shared certainly in Putney and, I think, in many other areas of London and in many other conurbations in Britain.

It is important that the way in which we go forward on the matter of the auction should not militate against smaller industries and businesses. I hope that when my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry replies, she will take account of the small taxi operator. I understand that already they can pay up to 30 times more than the major telecommunication operations, and that should not be so.

I also support other hon. Members' concerns for the fishing industry. A cousin of mine fishes for crab and lobster in the North sea. His boat is at Sheringham and his only means of communication is his mobile phone. I have previously told the House that I come from Norfolk and I am proud of it, and the fishermen of the North sea are important to the local communities. Like the taxi drivers, they should not be priced out of the market by this legislation. That is an extremely important part of the Bill.

The concessionary fees arrangement is important to our future. Services which at the moment receive concessionary fee arrangements, such as the ambulance services, are crucial to the delivery of health care. I have already mentioned the fishermen of the North sea and it is crucial that the lifeboat service, in its use of the wavelengths, is not priced out of the market. Again, I ask my hon. Friend to give assurances on that.

As a business man, I very much welcome the certainty provided by clause 4. It will provide enhanced security of tenure, which is desired by all business people in the telecommunications industry. I welcome also the reassurances given in this debate by my hon. Friend the Minister of State that there will be licence changes only on very rare occasions, such as when it is in the interests of national security or in compliance with Community obligations or international agreements to do so. There will be situations in which a person may wish to give up a licence, but the House should nevertheless applaud the enhanced security of tenure provided by clause 4.

I am extremely pleased that in clause 5 we are considering how grants might promote efficient spectrum management. My hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms) mentioned the need to look after the Community Media Association, which is very concerned to ensure that future spectrum use does not exclude community radio and community spectrum use. I should very much like community groups in my own constituency to be able to approach the Secretary of State under clause 5 for grants to develop facilities.

Clause 6 deals with consultation, which I have already dealt with at length. I should like, however, to reiterate the need to take account of consumer interest—which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham and by the hon. Member for Sevenoaks and is a matter of concern for hon. Members on both sides of the House. Assurances were given in another place that consumer interests were covered by the Telecommunications Act 1984. However, I ask the Minister to reassure the House that pledges to consider consumers' interests will be copper-bottomed.

The Bill not only shows the way for the future but it anticipates it. The Bill will promote the efficient use and management of the spectrum. The hon. Member for Sevenoaks said that the Bill is all about money, but I do not believe that that is so. It is about fairness and about providing a way forward that will make sense to taxi drivers in Ilford and to fishermen in the North sea.

The Bill is also about ensuring that the big boys pay their proper part of the charges. As I said, it is very interesting that, during the debate on the Bill in another place, the big operators did not say that they do not support it. The Bill offers charge reductions of up to 50 per cent. for groups that require our support. I therefore support the Bill.

8.21 pm

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): I was struck by what my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) said about local radio. I am not sure whether the Minister realises it, but I have a local radio station in my constituency. Perhaps I should say that for four months it was a local station that operated four restricted service licences. Then came the point at which the operators had to apply for a licence. As soon as they reached that stage, in moved the big boys. The station will now be local only in name.

Unfortunately, the telecommunications industry is all about the big boys, because the little boys are swept aside. We must remember that the industry is all about big firms that have the money. What worries me and many other people in the United Kingdom is that we have reached a situation in which not monopolies, but oligarchies, prevail. Individual firms can come together and collude, which leads to fewer firms and creates more problems for us to contain. I am therefore pleased to speak in the debate on the Second Reading of the Bill, which examines the cost-based fees that distort the market, encouraging the hoarding that is so unfair to small businesses.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry is fully aware of the current situation because she has taken the opportunity to visit my constituency. I am very grateful for that visit, during which she made a tremendous impression on my local chamber of commerce. She is a warm person and all hon. Members know how committed she is to her job, in which she has done tremendously well. She has come to the fore and made such a good impression that, for the first time, members of my local chamber of commerce believe that they have a Government who are listening to them.

Let us ensure that the consultation is taken seriously. It will be no good listening and not acting. Ministers are now going back to the firms and companies that they have already consulted to say, "We listened to you the first time round; now will you explain what you meant, because we are not quite sure if we are doing what you want us to do. Do we have it right?"

I represent a town that was built on small firms, and we prided ourselves on our resolve that large companies would not move into our area. We believe that we must allow our little companies an opportunity to show their entrepreneurial skill and to develop. They have grown from small to medium companies. The Bill will help in the objective of allowing small companies that are disadvantaged because of a lack of economies of scale to prove themselves. Large firms currently enjoy economies of scale which mean that they can sweep aside the competition, allowing no development opportunities for small firms.

Last night, with several other hon. Members, I attended a meeting at which the Office of Telecommunications regulator spoke about the competition Bill and about the future of the telecommunications industry. He said that neither he nor anyone else in the industry knew where the industry was going. Although they had an idea of where they are headed, they cannot be sure because of the tremendous speed of development in the telecommunications industry. Although the Bill deals with what we think will be the future, we had better plan on revisiting the issue in another three to five years. Technological advances in the industry are so great that channels in the spectrum will soon be condensed.

We must be very careful not to fall into old traps. I hope that another hon. Member will help me out, because I cannot remember the name of a company that submitted a bid for a railway franchise to move freight. About a year to 18 months later—almost overnight—those who won the franchise sold their assets and became millionaires.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry will be very careful in future auctions to ensure, first, that companies do not overextend themselves. However, I do not believe that British firms are so stupid as to overextend themselves. I think that they will offer a realistic price and avoid the trap mentioned by Opposition Members. The hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) told the House that British firms are so stupid that they will make bids that are so high that they will not be able to pay the licence fee or operate the franchise. I have no doubt that the business skills of those companies are quite acute. I have seen them operating, and they are very good. My great concern is that, if they are not careful, the Minister and his team may not see the collusion that can occur among bidders in the market and that British taxpayers may not get the best deal.

I can mention many people who have an interest in telecommunications matters—I have a list of some of them. As hon. Members will know, many people have cable in their homes., but companies are developing radio-controlled mobile telephones that can be switched from the car to the house. So, Mr. R. Longstaff of Shelton will hope that the Minister will look after his interests. Mr. D. Longwell will take an acute interest in the matter. Mr. A. P. Longworth, Mr. D. Lonsdale, Mr. F. G. Looker and Mr. G. Loomes will all be interested.

Mr. John M. Taylor: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We all know that there are necessary conventions that make the House work. My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) rose in good faith to wind up on behalf of the Opposition. Other hon. Members have since come into the Chamber, who have not been privy to the debate, and are now clearly filibustering, to the point of reading out lists of names from telephone directories. That may be entertaining, but it is not the way to run the House of Commons. The debate is running wrongly now and we look to your authority to ensure that it is properly wound up.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not for Opposition Members to dictate the course of the debate. The debate can go on until 10 o'clock and hon. Members will be allowed to make their contributions in the normal way.

Mr. Taylor: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I intended no disrespect to you, as you know. It is not for me to presume to advise how the debate should be run, but I am aware of the conventions. My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks rose in good faith to wind up and we are now hearing contributions from people who did not even hear what he had to say.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have dealt with that point of order already. Everything has been done as it should have been done, even if all the conventions have not perhaps been observed as they normally are.

Mr. Jenkins: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For the benefit of the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), I can confirm that I was here until just after 7 o'clock, when I had to leave. I watched the debate on the monitor while I was telephoning some people whom I had promised to telephone and I returned as soon as I could. I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman felt that I missed part of the debate—

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is obvious what the Government are doing. They are so embarrassed by what will be discussed in the Adjournment debate that they do not wish it to start early. That is an abuse of the Chamber and of the parliamentary process and it should be on the record.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Jenkins: The individuals I have mentioned have an interest in the Bill, because it involves their future. I am sure that the Government will safeguard their future. At the moment, they may not feel that they are part and parcel of the industry, but they are. The industry is coming their way fast.

Today we have certain technology and techniques, but in the future we will need to be quicker and more flexible to ensure that the appropriate instruments are put in place. I want a Government who are prepared to listen and act fast. If we do not act fast, we will lose our position. Britain is now the number one country in Europe for technology. Americans say that our technology is moving so fast that they come here to see how we operate and to take ideas back to America. We do not want to lose that position. We want to ensure that our industry is given the flexibility and the right to expand and develop.

[Mr. Jenkins]

I do not want a small oligopoly to determine the pace at which the industry moves. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will watch carefully the allocation of licences and the use of the spectrum. He has said that spectrum pricing is driven by the spectrum management and is not revenue raising. The allocation will raise money, but that will be for the management of the spectrum. We must ensure that our universities, which are at the cutting edge of technology, are given the necessary funding to carry out the research and development that will allow us to maintain our position as the forerunner in the use of the spectrum.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Putney said, small firms, especially local radio stations, should be given grants. We can raise prices to ensure that some of the spectrum is handed over by the Ministry of Defence, but we must be aware—as I am sure all Labour Members are—that that will create a marketplace. We will create an asset that can be sold, but we must be sure that we can control the process. If company A makes a legitimate bid for air slots, how can we ensure that it does not turn around and sell those slots to company B in the future? Company B could buy up sections of the spectrum and we would end up with a monopoly. What safeguards will the Minister put in place to ensure that that does not happen in Britain today? We know that the dead hand of monopoly has stifled British industry time and again. That is why we believe that the cutting edge of competition is vital to our industry and we must ensure that small firms are not squeezed out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should face the Chair and address his remarks to the Chair.

Mr. Jenkins: I will address the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It causes me some concern that licences are allocated annually. We know that we face a difficult situation, because people will not make large investments unless they have some security of tenure. However, security of tenure should not turn into a licence to print money. We should be able to take action against firms that do not safeguard the interests of the British people and foreclose them. We should ensure that we are able to compensate firms, if necessary, and put their share back on to the marketplace to ensure competition. The auctions should be run properly and the licences allocated to the right people. We must ensure at the same time that the Government are in control and can ensure that competition remains alive and the industry thrives.

I am glad to see that no new tax has been put on the mobile phone. What has not been mentioned is the cost of mobile phones today. Competition is supposed to drive prices down, but it sometimes seems that the mobile phone companies have a comfortable gentlemen's agreement between them. We do not always ensure that the companies use the airways to the best advantage.

When I travel round my constituency, I see not one mobile phone mast but two, three or four, and I am sure that other hon. Members do too. Will the Minister consider creating a national grid for those masts? The duplication must be terribly costly and that cost must be borne by the consumer, you and me, Mr. Deputy Speaker—well, it would be if I used my mobile phone, but I leave it switched off in my bag so that no one can get to me. As the Government, we must not be prepared to leave everything to the market.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Would my hon. Friend care to comment on the fact that schools and other organisations are bribed to put masts, those monstrosities, on top of their buildings? Does he know of any similar examples in his constituency? I could relate some stories.

Mr. Jenkins: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. One of the amazing things that caught us out totally was the fact that when an application to erect a mast is made, the local authority has just 28 days to raise objections. If it does not, it is deemed to have agreed to the application. One mast was erected alongside a person's house. He sued the local authority for negligence because it failed to put in an objection.

The system has caused chaos. We have had to plead to move masts. The companies act in such a manner that we get the impression that they have a God-given right to stick a mast wherever they want. They are all over the place.

Dr. Gibson: Can my hon. Friend tell me whether there are any health hazards associated with those masts? Such hazards have been documented in Australia and elsewhere and masts are banned in certain states of America.

Mr. Jenkins: I do not purport to be an expert on the use of high-frequency radio waves, but everyone is now aware of the medical advice not to carry the mobile in the top left-hand pocket because it discolours certain parts of the body. We are also told that if we keep it to the ear for too long, the radio waves start cooking the brain. I do not know whether that is true, but I have certainly seen many people walking around with them held to their ears—some people in the House have obviously held them there for too long.

With any new technology we have problems. The masts can be quite low, so high-frequency radio waves can bombard certain people. I would not wish, however, to start a scare about houses near such masts, not least because people whose houses are under electricity power cables cannot sell them because others do not want to live there. I would not wish to suggest that there is any physical risk to health from the radio masts—I will leave that to be drawn from evidence supplied at a later date. The phones worry me, however, which is why I carry mine in a bag and not in my pocket.

If no new tax is to be imposed on mobile phones, who will suffer under the Bill? It is estimated that more than 80 per cent. of users will pay no more in charges. In fact, some will pay less than they do now. Some small firms will pay less, so they will be at an advantage. Large firms, which enjoy tremendous advantages from economies of scale, pay so much less per unit cost that they, too, have a tremendous built-in advantage.

It would be good if we could help the small firms. I can assure the Minister that every taxi driver in my town will thank me if the bill for his radio is cut. When taxi drivers start thanking us, they tell the public. If they tell the public, they are telling my voters. The more they tell them what a good bloke I am, the more I like it. Truth will out, as they say, but I need that support. If, however, we get it wrong and they start saying what a rotten lot we are, I will be back in here to say to the Minister, "Look, you'd better get this right, I have got problems because my taxi drivers out there are against me."

There have been great developments in radio use and we will witness a tremendous extension of that technology. I want to ensure that the House is kept fully aware of all those developments. I know that that can be done via the Select Committee procedure, but hon. Members like me are getting a little bit old in the tooth now. In some instances we have let technology pass us by. To be honest, we need more information if we are to legislate for this specific market.

I now have a machine that I can plug into my laptop which, at the press of a button, transmits radio waves. Via my laptop and printer I can obtain a wiring diagram for a piece of equipment. Just 10 years ago that was impossible; in my father's time that would have been thought science fiction. The pace we are moving at is so fast that, as I have said for years, soon we will be able to walk about with a small device, point it upwards and pick up a transmission from a satellite or a mainframe computer. We will be able to give instructions to our boxes and get answers back to any question.

Even the House of Commons Library has a tremendous amount of information on disk and the retrieval rate is rapid. The information age is here. The one thing I know about business and life is that information is power. As a country, we are at the leading edge: so much power at our fingertips will put us at a great advantage. That is why the Government, to whom I am fully committed, will put a computer in every school—a modern, up-to-date computer linked to the internet so that our children can see today what tomorrow will be like. When many of us were at school, computers did not exist—in fact, some probably used the old slate and chalk, so we can see how fast things have changed during our lifetime. We should be fully aware of the importance of this Bill.

It says somewhere in the documentation that, after three years, the higher fees for taxi drivers may mean paying less than 20p extra per week. Most taxi drivers will wear that—they will not have a problem with it. The Government say that there are no current plans to apply administrative pricing to other services without consultation. We all know that if we ask people outside whether they want a price increase, not many will raise their hand. Just as no one votes for a tax increase, no one votes for a price increase.

We have to ensure, therefore, that we get value for money. The firms have been consulted and they can see the possible advantage; once we give them that advantage, they must not be able to rip us off. The valuable asset we have given them must be monitored closely. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will say that that point has been taken on board, but the framework may not be fully in place. Either the regulator's role in pricing and monitoring must be expanded or—as I would prefer—the House, through its Committees, should be able to monitor the situation. We should be able to question those responsible regularly so as to monitor our rate of progress as a country. That rate of progress is our future.

The industry is currently very competitive and can continue to be so. A regulatory framework is instrumental to the growth of the telecommunications industry. The third generation of mobile systems will deliver a wide range of innovative multimedia services and we will have a significant opportunity to build on the success of the second generation. The United Kingdom must continue to be at the forefront of that development and I want an assurance that, as a Government, we will do everything in our power to afford our industry every technical support.

Mr. White: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill is not only about the next generation of mobile phones, but about encouraging people to invest now to create new technologies for the new century and about providing a regulatory framework that allows entrants into the market?

Mr. Jenkins: I could not agree more and I was leading up to that very point—it is not about what we have, but about the future. If we are to develop centres of excellence, who is to fund them and who will fund research and development? If it is left to individual firms, can they afford to do it? Or is the Minister prepared to feed money, through the fee system, to the cutting edge so that we remain at the forefront of technology?

The fees charged on public broadcasters' transmissions will reflect public service obligations. I realise that television licences are not covered by the Bill, but our public service television is rated as being among the best, if not the best, in the world. I want guarantees that everything will be done to ensure that the public service providers are not starved of resources or priced out of the market, but are given resources to ensure that we remain at the forefront.

The Bill opens up the possibility of offering incentives to broadcasters to switch to digital. It has already been pointed out that the people most likely to switch to digital are those who already have cable or satellite. I do not have enough time to watch television at home; I seem to spend my time either here or out in my constituency. It is therefore not worth my while to buy a digital set. Indeed, my sets are so old that they switched from 425 to 625 not so long ago. I can only hope that I will still be able to receive signals for my sets in 10 years' time.

Be that as it may, the digital revolution to come is so great and so magical that it is essential to keep our eye on the situation and to ensure that progress is made. It will become possible to broadcast to very small numbers of viewers in the form of highly localised or specialised transmissions. In 10 years' time, the British Medical Association will be able to transmit at a given time to every doctor in the country. Material will be flashed to them, perhaps overnight, and recorded ready for viewing the next morning. Such will be the sophistication of these systems that they will be able to target very small numbers of subscribers.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Does my hon. Friend agree that the welcome technological advances that he is painting so colourfully are fine in their place, but that there is also much that the public service broadcasters can do to harness the new technology in the areas we inhabit? I refer to the no-man's land between the west midlands and the east midlands, which experiences real problems receiving television signals carrying the stories that people want to know about their localities. We seem to get information about the west

[Mr. David Taylor]

midlands—Walsall, Birmingham and so on—yet Leicestershire and the counties to the east, for which the broadcasting media are based in Nottingham, cannot for topological reasons receive adequate broadcasting of a high quality—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is far too long.

Mr. Jenkins: I can understand my hon. Friend's going on for so long; he feels passionately about the services in his area. I too feel passionate about the fact that I receive television signals from Nottingham and the west midlands even though I do not live there. Unfortunately, the cameras are not sent far outside Nottingham and the west midlands—they cover local stories, but not stories for my area.

The coming revolution presents the opportunity of much more localised services—and better services. The price of cameras and recording equipment has tumbled in the past decade. One reporter can now do the work that used to be performed by a crew of five. When I was elected to the House, a photographer took some pictures of me, put them into his computer, pressed a few keys, plugged in his modem, and the picture ended up on the editor's desk two minutes after it had been taken. We all remember how it used to be done: we took the pictures down to the chemist to have them developed and they were sent back to us through the post. Imagine how rapidly news can change if it can be recorded so quickly. Even the London *Evening Standard*, which comes out three or four times a day, would be slow compared with that technology. That is what I am saying.

The speed of technological change is such that we must be sure that we can cope with it. I am not sure whether, in essence, the Bill copes with it. The Minister must do more work in Committee to ensure that he has the power to cope with it, because tremendous changes are in the pipeline.

We cannot allow someone to take a licence and then say that it will be their property for ever and a day. There must be some public accountability. There must be some service to our country. I shall look for that in the final detail.

The process of legislating on this subject will not end this year; it will carry on a bit longer. Every year, as technology changes, we shall find ourselves chasing the industry. I, as a member of the party in government, want not to chase the industry but to lead it. The Bill is a first-class attempt at putting the Government in the position of leading the industry—hand in glove with industry, not dominating it but consulting it, always looking after its interests because, in the long term, the interests of that industry are the same as those of our people. That is why we have a Government today who look after all our people, because our future, the Government's future and the industry's future are tied together.

I shall support the Bill; I am proud to do so.

8.55 pm

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): I give my assurances to Conservative Members that I have no intention of using up parliamentary time. As a new Member, I am not familiar with the filibustering and the various other procedures that it is suggested that hon. Members may wish to use to intervene and prolong the business of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Mr. Jenkins) has already said many of the things that many of us would want to say, so you can be assured, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that my comments will be brief and to the point.

I came into the Chamber not necessarily wanting to speak but I was goaded into speaking by Conservative Members' over-concentration on the Bill's financial aspects—the revenue-raising powers. They concentrated on them so much that they increased the revenue each time that they spoke, and made ridiculous suggestions as to how such revenue would be spent, including ludicrous suggestions about money and revenue being focused on the millennium dome.

The only connection that I envisage between the millennium dome and the Bill is that when the dome is opened and thousands upon thousands of visitors turn up with their mobile phones, unless there is management of the spectrum—unless the Bill is allowed to succeed—the chaos that would ensue at Greenwich would probably bring even Greenwich mean time to a standstill because of our inability as a Government and as a nation to cope with the technology that confronts us and stands before us.

My main reason for speaking is to suggest to Conservative Members that this is more than a revenue-raising Bill. It is about the management of the spectrum. It is designed to ensure that revenue is available for research, and for expenditure that may be needed in relation to that growing technology and in relation to the various related works that need to be undertaken in the years ahead. Clause 5 will make it possible for the Government to provide financial support for the training of radio engineers in efficient spectrum management techniques—something that cannot and should not be afforded from present funds.

Mr. Lansley: Does not the hon. Gentleman seem to be implying that the revenue raised by administrative pricing, or taxation as it is rightly described, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) said, will be spent on the purposes outlined in clause 5? Yet the Minister has said precisely the opposite. He said—I believe that I have it accurately—that there is no question of hypothecation, so the revenue goes to the Exchequer. It is general taxation and can be spent on everything and anything. My hon. Friend is right when he refers to things as widespread as the millennium dome.

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that there is no exclusive reason why the hon. Gentleman should suppose that all of the moneys raised will automatically go back into those aspects that I mentioned, but clause 5 clearly says that

> "The Secretary of State may"

wish to

> "make grants"

to ease and aid funding for training. If the Government are to do that, it would be sensible to ensure that revenue is available. If the hon. Gentleman suggests that that revenue should come from other sources and therefore that money should be taken away from other services, he should say so. If not, he must accept that clause 5 provides that, should grants be made available, that money could come from the revenue-raising powers.

My main reason for speaking was to say that, if money is to be made available, I hope that it goes into research to ease the public's concern about a wide range of issues related to the new technology. I had a strange week of visits in my constituency of Northampton, South. One day I visited a school that was fighting hard to stop a radio mast being erected in its playground. The local parents had mixed feelings about the benefits to the school in terms of the revenue that would be raised through rent from the radio company, but they also had concerns that were probably not fully warranted about how the mast could affect the health of their children playing in close proximity to it. On the Friday, I visited a school that was happy to have a mast on its site. Indeed, it was so happy that it was looking forward to having a second mast to raise more revenue so that it could take advantage of the new technologies that are upon us.

There was thus a certain confusion: should we or should we not; and what are the benefits and deficits of such technology? A huge job needs to be done to explain to the general public the benefits of the increase in radio and spectrum traffic. We need definitive research studies on the subject.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Could the hon. Gentleman enlighten us on what he thinks are the benefits of digital convergence in relation to education? He says that they should be explained to other people. Will he give us some clues?

Mr. Clarke: There are many benefits, but those expressed to me on my visits were, unfortunately, all financial. Due to the under-funding of education by the previous Government, schools need to raise revenue quickly to sustain their budgets.

Research needs to be carried out and the public should be informed about any possible health risks. If the studies show that there is none, the public should be told that they are safe. All that work must be funded, as must the training of radio engineers. I would feel uncomfortable if such a Bill suggested that all the work would be funded only from the existing budgetary provisions and if we did not provide for further funding.

I hope that, in replying to the debate, my hon. Friend the Minister will concentrate on issues other than simply the revenue-raising powers, which seem to be so important to Opposition Members. I hope that she will concentrate on issues which, I hope, will enable the Government to ensure that we face the increase in traffic and in the use of technology such as mobile phones in a way that is managed and acceptable to the nation.

9.2 pm

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): This is my maiden speech. I did not intend to make my maiden speech on this issue because I know as much about wireless telegraphy as the seat that I have been sitting on for the past three and a half hours. I rise because I have been enlivened by tonight's debate. I have learnt a tremendous amount and thought that I may be able to add a little to the debate.

My constituency of St. Albans is 20 miles north of London, according to my calculation. The Fees Office has a different perspective on it and says that it is 18 miles from London. We are arguing over the last two miles and I am sure that, in due course, we shall reach a compromise—probably 19 miles.

St. Albans is rich in history. Archbishops of Canterbury—try saying that when you have had a couple of sherbets—are trained there. We are also unique in the world, in that we have had an Archbishop of Canterbury, we are training another one and we have provided the only English pope, Adrian IV.

The war of the roses, and the peasants' revolt led by Watt Tyler, took place in and around St. Albans. People were beheaded for standing up for the rights of working people. We also had the first English martyr, St. Alban, which is how our city got its name.

James Corbett has just written a book that chronicles the history. His brother is my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett). I promised that I would mention James tonight. I was at the launch of his book last Saturday, when James, Robin and I signed books and he gave them out. He said that if I gave him a plug tonight, he would give me a free copy of the book for my Christmas present.

Previously, I worked as a director of a housing association that specialised in housing people with mental health problems. This is where wireless telegraphy comes in. In that profession, we relied heavily on communications, especially mobile phones. If one goes out visiting someone with a mental health problem, it is vital to be in contact with one's base, to be safe and secure, and it is vital to be able to communicate quickly with the emergency services—fire, police, ambulance and, most importantly, the crash mental health team, which often had to come out and look after our clients when they got into deep trouble.

I understand that I am obliged by protocol to praise my predecessor, who is a Member of the House still, the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley). It was unkindly alleged that he had done a chicken run and moved from the seat that I now represent to another seat. I would not suggest that for one second. There is no doubt that if he had stayed, I would have beaten him, but that is by the bye. He moved to another seat.

I must say, to the right hon. Gentleman's credit, that on the two or three occasions that I went to see him at his surgeries, he was always courteous. He always sent me a Christmas card. I have 12 Christmas cards from Peter Lilley. They are not still on the mantelpiece, but I saved them because they are precious to me. He was kind, courteous and always gave a reasoned response if one wrote to him, whatever the issue was.

I am receiving a lot of letters about an issue in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency, concerning a motorway service station that is due to be built in Redbourn. I take great delight in telling people that it is not in my constituency and passing them on to the right hon. Gentleman. I have sent him 70 already, and as more come in, I will keep sending them to him.

I have a rather unusual first name—Kerry. It is an Irish name. I am very proud of it now, although when I was a lot younger, I had a little difficulty with it because, until I was about 12 years old, I regularly had to drop my trousers to show that I was a male. I was born a male, I am a male now, and I am going to stay a male until I die, unless of course the party decides that quotas mean that we might need to—but if we do, I might do the other thing.

[Mr. Kerry Pollard]

According to an Irish translation that I have, the name Kerry means firm of purpose, generous and kind of spirit. I could not possibly say that I was all those things, but others might.

To return to the Bill, I am pleased to support it. Our Government are making steady progress in a way that is right for the country and right for the industry. I urge hon. Members to support the Bill.

9.7 pm

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard) on an excellent and perhaps impromptu maiden speech. It is clear from his performance tonight that he will serve his St. Albans constituents with great distinction in the coming years. I congratulate him on the result in that constituency on 1 May. I am especially glad that he will be able to close his collection of Christmas cards from the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), and I wish him well in his negotiations with the Fees Office.

I hesitate to rise so soon after such a tour de force from my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Mr. Jenkins), who gave us a tremendously wide-ranging and detailed analysis of the challenges confronting the radio communications industry, and a persuasive argument for the Bill. He also gave us an eclectic examination of the potential impact of the Bill.

My hon. Friend may claim to be long in the tooth and from the old school, but in the case that he put for the Bill this afternoon and this evening—I think that it was this afternoon and this evening—he was advocating in the strongest terms a measure that will serve the new generation, not just the old.

I, too, welcome the Bill. As we move into the next century, we simply cannot run our radiocommunications system with legislation that was passed in the first half of this century. The radio spectrum is a national asset and a communications resource whose time is still to come.

The Bill may appear obscure to some. On Second Reading on 5 June 1997 at column 714, in another place, the Minister described it as an "arid, arcane, technical" matter concerning management of the radio spectrum. People may wonder why radio occupies a prime place in the first legislative programme and the first Queen's Speech of the first Labour Government for almost 20 years. For most of us, radio is background noise while we are having a bath, a shower, or breakfast. To many, it may be a source of argument with the children as to whether to listen to Radio 1 or Radio 4, Radio 3 or Hallam FM. In my family, we often compromise on BBC Radio Sheffield.

This Bill occupies a prime place in the first Queen's Speech and the first legislative programme of the first Labour Government for nearly 20 years because radio is a key component of our communications infrastructure. It is a key factor in our communications future. As the importance of mobile communications increases, so does the importance of radio.

With the blurring of boundaries between telephony and computing, radio and the case for legislation such as this become even more important. In the end, radio is the only medium capable of delivering real mobility. The radio spectrum will be the master route to the information super-highway and the information revolution. A modern economy depends on effective access to, and management of, its radio spectrum.

Research conducted by the Radiocommunications Agency states that 400,000 jobs in the United Kingdom currently depend directly on radio. That number is predicted to grow by 1,000 per week. Not enough of those jobs are to be found in the constituency that I represent in Rotherham and the Dearne: we could do with some new technology, modern industry and economic growth. The Radiocommunications Agency research also establishes that the industry contributes £13 billion per year to gross domestic product, and grows at a rate of £1 billion per year. The industry and the Bill are critical to the future of this country.

The radio spectrum is a finite resource facing growing demands. Government have a responsibility to act to ensure that the resource is managed properly. That is what the Bill sets out to do, and that is why it is so important and long overdue. The legislation is designed to dispel the spectre of spectrum shortages and to eliminate the crisis of spectrum congestion. It is designed to put the industry, which, if we are honest, has outgrown its legislation, on a modern footing.

That is why I welcome clause 1, which will allow us to move from an antiquated system of administrative charging based on the bureaucratic costs of raising the licences to one that will allow us to tailor charges to the pressures of spectrum management; to move to a system in which we can fit charges to spectrum demand, a system where we can use charges to deal with spectrum congestion.

Clause 2 concerns matters that the Secretary of State should take into account when she sets the fees within the new system. I shall return to clause 2 later.

I shall make a couple of points about the charging system. I welcome the commitment that fees will be no higher than necessary, for reasons of spectrum management. I welcome the fact that the best estimates available suggest that the extra charge will be no more than 20p per taxi per week, or 15p per mobile phone per week, or 1p per exchange line per week. The majority of people using the radio spectrum will, of course, pay less under the new regime. The new system will price business into the radio spectrum, not out of it.

The Bill will also provide security of tenure for users of the spectrum. Security of tenure is not legally, fully and properly founded at present. It is a welcome and refreshing change to see a Secretary of State willingly give up powers that she already has under existing legislation in order that those using the services within the system may be more secure. It is one of the most encouraging and strongest signs that we do indeed have a change of Government. We have a new Government and a new approach.

Clause 3 introduces the concept of auction. This part of the Bill could bring greater flexibility and greater financial returns to Government management of the radio spectrum. Auctions have important potential advantages, but, as the Government have made amply clear, they are not appropriate in all cases. They should not, as some fear and have argued, increase operators' costs excessively, because bidders will bid only what they think the value of the franchise to be.

There has been much argument today over the sums that this measure may raise, with some wild calculations from Opposition Members. This is an important potential source of revenue. We should not turn up our noses at it. That said, I welcome the assurances by Ministers that auctions will not be used for existing licensees to continue to provide existing services; that they will not be used for broadcasters who have already gone through an auction or competitive bidding process under the Broadcasting Act 1990 to provide the broadcasting services for which they are responsible. Auctions will not be used for small and medium businesses, such as the excellent A1 taxi firm, which operates right across my constituency in Rotherham and the Dearne.

We will, however—this is the part of the Bill with real potential—be able to apply the auction process to new national and regional services. I hope that we are looking at and talking about actively considering third generation mobile telephony. There are the prospects of the universal mobile telecommunications service—UMTS. That is where the mobile telephone needs computer technology. That is where use is made of both terrestrial and satellite links. That is where the future of our communications industry lies. That is where also we have an obvious candidate for auction.

I recognise that the Government have given no commitments on that score so far. They are consulting on the possibility of applying auction to the development and I encourage Ministers in that process.

We should be aiming for a framework for radio spectrum use, as well as one for management, that is foresighted and flexible enough for future developments well into the next century. Through the Bill we aim for better commercial use of a national asset. We should aim also for provision for better cultural and social use of a national asset.

I return briefly to clause 2, which sets out the matters that the Secretary of State may have regard to in setting fees. These matters include availability, demand, promoting efficient use, economic benefits, innovation and competition. In addition to the list of matters that the Secretary of State may take into account, however, we should have social and cultural use.

Mr. Fallon: Inadvertently, I am sure, the hon. Gentleman has not noticed that the Secretary of State must have regard to the matters that are listed in clause 2. Is the hon. Gentleman proposing to volunteer to serve in Committee, which may be something that is volunteered on his behalf, and to move an amendment to include social and cultural use? How will he define the social and cultural matters to which he refers?

Mr. Healey: My reading of the Bill is rather different from that of Conservative Members. I read clause 2 as providing an enabling power for the Secretary of State to take the matters listed into account without placing an obligation on her to do so.

I am talking about voluntary sector organisations, which will be faced with difficulties. I have in mind organisations whose very mission in life is social inclusion and cultural diversity, which could be priced out of the market if they have to pay market rates. I urge the Government to consider that as they examine the Bill during its progress through the House.

Mr. Hayes: Clause 2 specifically states that

"the Secretary of State shall have regard",

not may have regard or have an opportunity to regard. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads the clause more carefully.

Mr. Healey: If that be the case, I would add social and cultural diversity to the list of matters that the Secretary of State takes into account. I consider that my case has been made all the stronger.

Mr. Lansley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Healey: No, I must press on.

Without the powers that are provided by the Bill we risk restricting the growth of some of the most important sectors of our economy. Without such powers, we risk depriving people throughout the country of some of the potential benefit of a new generation of communications technology.

9.23 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I shall be brief. I wish merely to draw to the attention of Ministers and of the House generally my concerns about the implications of the Bill for the environment.

Excellent contributions to the debate have shown just how much United Kingdom industry can benefit from the Bill and how important it is that we keep abreast of new technology. The Minister of State has an onerous brief and a huge work load at the Department of Trade and Industry, and I have enormous respect for him. We need to keep abreast of new technology, and we will have opportunities for better management of the spectrum, but my plea to him is that we should also consider environmental concerns as the Bill goes through its various parliamentary stages. I understand that the DTI, like all other Government Departments, puts the environment at the heart of its proposals.

Will the Under-Secretary explain how planning legislation and planning controls will be strengthened in respect of any additional telecommunications masts that may be required? It is a matter of great concern to me that current planning legislation does not enable local communities to be properly consulted about where any additional telecommunications masts may be sited. Further advances in new technology, such as satellite communications, have enormous environmental implications. If we are to grasp the precautionary principle, the DTI should at least have regard to these most important environmental considerations.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make a small contribution to this important debate.

9.25 pm

The Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry (Mrs. Barbara Roche): We have had a wide-ranging and generally constructive debate. I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for having taken part in this important debate.

I am sad that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) has not seen fit to be present for the conclusion of the debate, given that he opened for the Opposition. I wondered where he was, because I know

[Mrs. Barbara Roche]

what it is like being in opposition. He recently explained to the Conservative party conference how Oppositions spend their time. He talked about ringing the office of the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths). He said:

> "I rang his office the other day. Well, there's not much else to do in opposition, is there? I thought it was a wet Tuesday, so I'll ring Nigel Griffiths's office and ask what he's up to."

As we speak, the right hon. Gentleman is probably using his phone, or his mobile phone, to ring my hon. Friend. It is a great pity that he cannot be with us now, but I am sure that he is with us in spirit.

I was also fascinated by the contribution of the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon). His speech was constructive in parts. He quite properly raised one or two issues. He made great play of the term "administrative pricing", as if it was an invention of the new Government. He had some time out of the House during the previous Parliament, so it may have escaped his attention, but I remind him that this term was used in the Conservative Government's 1996 White Paper.

The hon. Gentleman referred to auctions, and asked, "Isn't this a tremendously new thing? Why is it being introduced?" The document published by the previous Government in June 1996 called "Spectrum Management: into the 21st Century" says:

> "Auctions are, in principle, the Government's preferred method of spectrum pricing."

It would be good to have consistency from the hon. Gentleman and from the Conservative party.

Conservative Members also make great play of the implications for industry, and argue that this measure is terrible for industry. I remind them of what industry has said during the consultation process. Ionica says:

> "Ionica welcomes the Government's proposals for the introduction of spectrum pricing, outlined both in this Consultative Document and in the Wireless Telegraphy Bill."

Cable and Wireless says:

> "Cable and Wireless Communications supports the use of administrative pricing as a means of achieving a fairer and more rational basis for pricing spectrum that takes into account the value of the resource that is used and provides incentive for spectrum efficiency."

We have also had comments from the Federation of Communication Services. Vodafone says that there is no new tax on mobile phones. What more reassurance does the hon. Gentleman want? I suggest to him that he and his right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham would be better occupied not in telephoning the office of my hon. Friend—delighted though I am sure he is to have conversations with them—but in going out and talking to industry, because it is industry that will put them right.

Mr. Fallon: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Roche: Of course: I shall be only too delighted.

Mr. Fallon: I am extremely grateful to the Minister, and I thank her for all her kind references to me. I hope that she was not attempting to mislead the House by suggesting that the Federation of Communication Services whole-heartedly welcomed the Bill. The federation's document states:

> "Neither the full impact of the legislation nor how the Government intends to use its new powers are clearly understood. There are many small and medium sized companies . . . who fear that their future access to spectrum may only be by an auction process. They believe this will jeopardise their businesses."

One would be hard stretched to describe that as a welcome for the Bill.

Mrs. Roche: I hope to reassure the hon. Gentleman, but let me also remind him that the federation said:

> "The concept of a spectrum pricing tool, available to support the implementation of a well-defined spectrum management strategy, is most welcome."

We welcome the federation's comments, and its contribution to the debate.

I cannot emphasise too strongly that the Bill is all about ensuring the supply of the raw material on which one of the most successful and dynamic sectors of the economy relies. In today's debate, we have heard about the truly remarkable contribution that the radio industry makes to economic success, competitiveness and jobs; we have heard about the rapid and accelerating rate of progress in the century since radio began to be exploited. My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) made that point very strongly.

We have also discussed one of the latest examples—the next generation of mobile communications systems, known as "third generation", or the universal mobile telecommunications service. First generation analogue and second generation digital mobile telephone technology have brought the benefits of mobile communications to millions of business and domestic users.

The third generation now offers the exciting prospect of full interactive multimedia capabilities with high-speed mobile access to a wide range of entertainment and information services. They will include full mobile office services, home shopping, real-time video and the wealth of material on the internet, leading us, in part, to the information age and the information society that we all want to embrace. The hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce)—who is a great expert, like my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms)—portrayed that new age very well.

The United Kingdom has been in the vanguard of the mobile communications revolution. We are now maintaining our position at the cutting edge of the communications revolution by becoming the first country in Europe to start the process of consulting on third generation licensing. It was a proud moment when, on behalf of the Government, I was able to begin that process.

Our aim is to provide licensing certainty for 1998-99. We are currently considering the responses to our consultative document "Multimedia Communications on the Move", which was issued on 31 July and sought comments by 17 October. I am delighted to tell the House that a number of useful comments have been received, which we will take fully into account in developing the next stages of the process. The Department will continue to consult the industry on the details as they are developed.

We note what was said about consultation. The hon. Member for Sevenoaks and others drew attention to the need for consultation for all in the industry. Clearly, Government and industry need to be in partnership to ensure that the United Kingdom's competitive edge is fully realised. Meanwhile, I am keen to promote debate. The responses—except where confidentiality was requested—will shortly be placed on the Radiocommunications Agency's internet site. I hope that that will reassure the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed), who raised questions about secrecy. The Radiocommunications Agency prides itself on being as open as possible, and we will seek to use new technology to further that openness.

Britain is a world leader in the use of radio, but maintaining that position and future success and progress depend critically on ensuring adequate supplies of radio spectrum. It is a finite resource, yet demand is increasing as new applications come on stream and existing services grow. Shortages and congestion are developing over time.

If spectrum cannot be made available to allow the speedy introduction of new radio-based services, the cost to the economy can be substantial. That was pointed out in some excellent speeches by my hon. Friends. It has been estimated, for example, that, in the United States, delays in allowing fully fledged competition in mobile telecommunications cost about $50 billion a year in lost consumer welfare.

Closer to home, consultants have calculated that a two-year delay in the introduction in the UK of personal communication network services, such as Orange and One-2-One, would have cost the economy £2.5 billion a year and more than 7,000 jobs. This new Government, with their commitment to our country's welfare, to British industry and to jobs and competitiveness, have no intention of allowing that to happen. We will make progress.

As has been pointed out, at the other end of the scale, a taxi driver denied access to mobile radio because an assignment cannot be found could face additional costs of several thousand pounds a year. Spectrum shortages are extremely costly for businesses of all sizes, from multinational telecommunication corporations to taxi drivers.

Spectrum management is key to making the most effective use of the finite spectrum resource and to reaping the full economic benefits from it. The Bill acts decisively to provide the modern spectrum management tools that we require, to make available the radio spectrum that businesses of all sizes need.

Concerns have been expressed about changes to licence fees. It is true that some fees will go up, but, under our proposals, fee increases will be focused on areas and services where spectrum congestion is worst.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am grateful to the Minister for saying that she has some firm proposals about how licence fees will go up. Will she publish those before we get to the later stage of the Bill?

Mrs. Roche: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are consulting hard. When we reach the later stages of the Bill, we will allow a full debate on that matter. Conservative Members will press us on it—rightly: it is their job to do so—and, under the normal procedure, we will make available all the details we can.

Concern has been expressed this evening about the impact on small business. I am grateful to my hon. Friends and to Conservative Members who have talked about small business. As I am sure hon. Members will appreciate, small and medium enterprises are dear to my heart. In an excellent and wide-ranging speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Mr. Jenkins) focused on small business and what that meant. The majority of small business users will pay no more than at present or they may pay less—some may pay nearly 50 per cent. less.

I assure hon. Members that fee increases will be no more than those necessary for spectrum management. That assurance is buttressed by clause 2. Hon. Members have made great play of the fact that that requires various factors to be taken into account in assessing fees. Like my hon. Friend the Minister of State, I assure the House that our aim is not to price businesses out of spectrum, but to price them into it by promoting greater spectrum efficiency, thereby making more spectrum available.

Mr. Fallon: The Minister will recall that I asked her—perhaps she is coming to it—whether the compliance cost assessment deposited with the Bill is still valid. She will read in that that an increase of more than 70 per cent is proposed for taxi firms in London, Birmingham and Manchester. How does that help a small business? The compliance cost assessment specifically refers to a taxi firm with only 10 mobiles.

Mrs. Roche: I am glad to hear about the hon. Gentleman's concern for small businesses. He will remember that the previous Government published an assessment. We shall publish an up-to-date one.

I assure the House that our aim is not to price businesses out of spectrum but to price them into it—that theme has been echoed by some of my hon. Friends. That will especially benefit small firms that currently have to be denied access to the spectrum they require. I also assure the House that, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State has said, fees under the new system will be fairer, and current distortions against small businesses will be removed. Users will no longer be charged so much more than large businesses for a given amount of spectrum.

The Bill will be good for business. Spectrum pricing will be used to promote greater efficiency in the way in which spectrum is used. In turn, that will provide the headroom that industry needs for future innovation and growth. Many hon. Members have spoken about innovation and creativity, and have dealt particularly with what new market entrants can offer.

The Bill will encourage innovation and creativity. The legislation is vital for the future prosperity of those industries and for our country. Under our proposals, the fee increases that radio users in congested areas face will in all probability be far outweighed by the economic benefits of making more spectrum available.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Wokingham is not in his place, because he suggested that the Bill would be unnecessary if the Government managed their spectrum more effectively. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] I do not know where he is: perhaps he is making the phone calls about which I spoke earlier. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is present and is taking such a close interest in the legislation.

[Mrs. Roche]

The right hon. Member for Wokingham said that, if only the Government managed their spectrum more effectively, everything would be fine and the legislation would not be needed. That statement is surprising for a number of reasons. I remind the House that Government spectrum is dedicated to essential users such as the armed forces and the emergency services. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would not wish to compromise the operational effectiveness of our armed forces or our emergency services.

I do not accept that there is gross inefficiency in the way that spectrum is used in the public sector. For example, the Ministry of Defence has been generally co-operative in returning spectrum to non-military use and sharing spectrum. If the right hon. Member for Wokingham has any hard evidence that the public sector is hoarding spectrum, I should be interested to receive it. I look forward to hearing from him.

Some of the military spectrum is subject to NATO obligations on civil use, and that imposes real constraints on the extent to which it can be used for non-military purposes. I repeat that it cannot be unilaterally converted to non-military use. Much Government use of spectrum is outside major conurbations where main congestion occurs. Looking at the overall division of spectrum without taking account of geographical variations is simplistic and inaccurate. Even if it were possible to transfer more Government spectrum to private sector use, it would be unlikely to meet all the demands in congested areas. If the right hon. Gentleman thinks differently, I should be grateful to hear from him.

I assure the House that we are not complacent. Like other public sector users, the Ministry of Defence will have financial incentives under spectrum pricing to continue to strive to improve spectrum efficiency.

We have received more than 60 responses to our consultation from a broad cross-section of radio users and others, and I am grateful to everyone who participated. The responses confirmed the industry's broad agreement in principle with the use of spectrum pricing as a spectrum management tool.

There was wide recognition of the progress that has been made since the previous Government's White Paper was published. That reflects the fact that we have had the opportunity to hold further discussions with the industry and have listened to what it has said. We place great store on consultation and shall continue our approach of working with industry. I recognise that a number of important issues concerning the application of spectrum pricing remain to be resolved, and that has been referred to in a number of speeches this evening. The responses made a number of helpful and constructive suggestions for further improving the proposals, and we shall be following those up.

I can inform the House that the Radiocommunications Agency will be discussing the proposals and responses with users and industry during the coming weeks, and we shall review them further in the light of that work. We hope to publish later this year a further consultative document which will take account of industry's views, outlining proposals for the introduction of spectrum pricing in 1998. That is vital, and shows our commitment to open discussion in this area. I also expect that the spectrum management advisory group, which my hon. Friend the Minister of State announced today, will play a role in that process.

Subject to the enactment of the Bill, our aim is to lay before Parliament the first fees regulations under the new regime early in the next financial year. Those will address the most significant distortions and anomalies arising from the present cost-based fees, whereby the largest users pay far less per unit of spectrum than the smallest.

Again, in the spirit of openness and transparency, and to respond to the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall, I can further inform the House that I shall place in the Library copies of a document summarising the responses. In addition, as I have said, the Radiocommunications Agency will use the internet site in order further to make available the responses, so that as wide a section of the public as possible can see them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Ms Perham) raised two important issues. First, with regard to monitoring, she suggested that the Radiocommunications Agency should monitor spectrum usage so that efficient users can be rewarded when future allocations or reviews are conducted.

I totally agree that monitoring is an essential component of spectrum management. The agency has a facility that provides a range of terrestrial and satellite monitoring services around the clock, 365 days a year. Its work is key to effective management of the radio spectrum and to dealing with radio interference. I am sure that all hon. Members would want to pay tribute to the agency's hard work in that area.

My hon. Friend also referred to the application of spectrum pricing to small businesses, in particular to taxis. As a fellow London Member, I share her appreciation of our taxis. Radio communications are extremely important to small firms and the efficient conduct of their business. Given my other ministerial responsibilities, it will come as no surprise that in that respect I am happy to reassure my hon. Friend that spectrum pricing will be considerably fairer to small business users of radio than the present cost-based fees.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Ham, among others, raised the subject of new entrants to the market. I make it clear that, with regard to auctions, we are talking about new services, such as the third generation of mobile phones. I can reassure my hon. Friend that the advisory group announced this evening will have a key role in advising Ministers on the subjects that he discussed.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Is the Minister saying that there will be spectrum auctions not for systems that are currently in place—for the normal form of mobile communications—but only for systems comprising a completely new technology?

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman raised that point in his important speech, and I am delighted to give him the assurance he seeks.

The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall also raised the issue of competition, which is an important factor that must be taken into account in considering clause 2.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) asked what should be taken into account in conducting auctions. Important factors in considering auctions include the feasibility of roll-outs and infrastructure investment. We believe that the third generation of mobile telephones will certainly require a great deal of investment by industry, and the Bill provides it with the reassurance it requires.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire raised the issue of radio astronomy. I can assure him that it will be protected. He also mentioned digital technology. New powers in the Bill can certainly be used to provide incentives in the move to digital. I hope that I have reassured him on that matter. He and other hon. Members mentioned clause 5, which provides a new power that will be very important for research.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White) made a very good speech about auctions, and I hope that my comments will reassure him on that matter. He made very good points about the convergence of broadcasting, telecommunications and the information technology industries, and about how they could win for British industry and for Britain. The success of those industries is important also to the Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) made an excellent speech about spectrum management. I hope that I have been able to reassure him on that matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Quinn) made an interesting speech dealing with the arguments for spectrum efficiency and with how such efficiency can help small business.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) for his warm welcome for the legislation. I am also grateful for his description of the legislation as an engine that will help to drive British industry in the necessary direction. He also mentioned the important fact that the Bill will help to modernise the infrastructure, enabling our industries to prosper. Those aspects are very important to the Government.

I very much welcome the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth, who said that the Bill can be regarded as not only very technical but of vital importance to the economy. It will provide us with a platform for developing the economy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman), who is a distinguished business man, spoke up for small business and told the House what it requires. I thank him very much for his speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) expressed his support for the Bill, and made the important point that it is not about raising revenue but about efficient spectrum management. He spoke also about another important aspect of the Bill, which is that it will help in research.

I was also delighted to hear the maiden speech from my hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard). It was a wonderful speech, in which he showed, when he talked about the importance of radio and communications and made connections with his constituency, what an able and articulate Member of Parliament he is and what an asset he will be to the House. I am delighted to be able to pay tribute to him.

The question of the attitude of consumers to the Bill has also arisen this evening. I assure the House that the National Consumer Council and the Consumers Association did not feel that the implications for consumers were significant. The National Advisory Council on Employment of People with Disabilities thought that people with disabilities were unlikely to be deterred from using mobile telephones. As has already been mentioned, the National Farmers Union, which was consulted, also supports the Bill.

This evening, we have had a good, far-reaching debate, which has covered many areas. The Bill is a technical one and is necessary for the industry, but it goes wider than that. If this country is to prosper and maintain its competitive position in a global market, we need to exploit our business potential, and the Government have to work in partnership with industry to push forward the technology. We cannot stand still. We cannot, as the Opposition seem to wish, carry on as before and do nothing. We must move forward with the industry, which warmly welcomes the Bill. I am delighted that the majority of speeches we have heard today also welcome it.

The Bill will provide the country with the spectrum management tools we need if we are to meet the challenges that lie ahead and maintain the United Kingdom's place at the cutting edge of the digital communications revolution. We really do face a revolution, and this country can lead the way in the use of the new technology.

We have had some discussion about the meaning of information technology and its effects. A true information society cannot be made up of the information haves and the information have-nots. That is why the Government are dedicated to ensuring that the information society is for all citizens. We want to build a truly competitive society, and the Bill will help to do so. I thank all the hon. Members who have taken part in the debate tonight, and I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY BILL [*LORDS*] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Wireless Telegraphy Bill [*Lords*], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(1) any expenses of the Secretary of State under the Act, and

(2) any sums required by the Secretary of State for the purpose of making—

(a) refunds in respect of charges paid in respect of licences under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949, and

(b) grants relating to the efficient use or management of the electro-magnetic spectrum for wireless telegraphy.—[*Mr. Betts.*]

Question agreed to.

WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY BILL [*LORDS*] [*WAYS AND MEANS*]

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Wireless Telegraphy Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the imposition, in respect of licences under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949, of increased charges payable into the Consolidated Fund.—[*Mr. Betts.*]

Question agreed to.

British Coal (Overseas Competition)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

9.58 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Several years ago, I refused to support the then Government's policy of pit closures. I was brought up in Sheffield and I have a strong attachment to the mining industry. I had miners in my constituency, and still do, many of whom work, or have worked, at Silverdale and Trentham. Many of them lost their jobs.

The current Government were so concerned about opposition from their Back Benchers that they spun out the debate on the Wireless Telegraphy Bill to prevent their Members from coal mining areas perhaps from even being tempted to come to this debate. Who knows?

One of my main arguments at the time of the pit closure programme was my anger at the extent of the unfair German state aids given to the German coal industry, which amounted to about £6 billion a year and were authorised by the European Commission. I said then that that was destroying, and would continue to destroy, the British coal industry and drive British miners out of work. I argued that that unfair competition, aided and abetted by the Commission, was proof that the European Coal and Steel Community was not designed to provide a level playing field but favoured Germany at our expense. What I predicted then has now happened.

I know from my discussions in my constituency that Silverdale management and miners are deeply—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

Mr. Cash: The Silverdale management and miners in my constituency are deeply concerned about the situation.

Earlier this year, the European Select Committee, of which I am a member, pursued the issue with the Department of Trade and Industry and the European Commission, and we will, I am sure, continue to do so. Although I regarded the DTI's concern as very late in the day, it made a complaint to the Commission in relation to the 1993 rules under decision 3632/93/ECSC.

The Select Committee reported that the average cost of production in the Community in 1994 was 190 ecu per tonne of coal equivalent, while the price of imported coal scarcely exceeded 43 ecu. Germany and Spain were singled out as the main culprits. Indeed, between 1993 and 1994, the Commission allowed Germany an increase of 71 per cent. in state aids. That massive protection coincided with the pit closure programme in Britain which I opposed.

The state aids were designed to protect German coal intended for electricity generation and its £6 billion state aids compared starkly with the United Kingdom coal aid of a minuscule £15 million this year.

Under pressure from the Select Committee, Commissioner van Miert agreed to look into the unauthorised state aids being given in Germany to subsidise exports of German anthracite to the United

Kingdom which undermined the market, damaging Celtic Energy, and many in south Wales who work in the industry and whose jobs are threatened.

New Labour has a serious problem and it is in deep trouble with its voters in the traditional old Labour areas and with all those voters with deep emotional attachment to them. The Prime Minister and the Government are on the rack and in a fix. They cannot control the situation. They are betraying their heritage and the mask of new Labour hides the fear in the faces of their traditional supporters.

I understand that the matter has been with Directorate-General XVII since the end of October 1996. The Commission has now acknowledged that there are grounds for a complaint by Celtic Energy and the German Government are obliged to reply to it by 4 November this year. What is new Labour doing about that?

I can tell hon. Members what the Trades Union Congress has to say this year about the dangers facing the coal industry and the prospects of massive unemployment. It said in a recent paper:

> "Congress also notes that globally coal will remain the dominant feed stock for electricity generation with demand set to increase substantially in the third world. Congress notes that in large degree the UK's success in reducing CO_2 emissions has largely been at a price of colliery closures . . . Congress is aware that the existing contracts for the supply of coal to electricity generators will come to an end during 1998. Congress is also aware that the Prime Minister"—

no less, who walks on water—

> "has committed the United Kingdom to achieve a 20 per cent. reduction in CO_2 emissions over the next 12 years and that the reason why the United Kingdom was able to meet its last set of targets was largely related to the artificially imposed 'dash for gas'."

That policy is now being endorsed by new Labour.

The TUC continues:

> "Congress is appalled at the proposal for a Council Directive prepared by the European Commission relating to the emission of acid gases such as sulphur and nitrogen oxides. If implemented, Britain would pay half the total EU costs and it would lead to the premature closure of all remaining pits and remaining coal-fired power stations before the expiration of their design lives, resulting in substantial economic disbenefits to the UK's national interests."

So much for the national economic interest pronounced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his statement on Monday—new Labour is killing the coal industry. The TUC paper continues:

> "This is of particular concern as it appears that the EU's proposals have been based on inadequate scientific analysis and will deliver no discernable benefit. The General Council is instructed to press the DTI and the Department of Environment to block this destructive proposal in its present form, and demand that a scientifically rigorous cost benefit analysis be undertaken by the European Commission before any further proposals are promulgated."

I ask the Minister to tell me in his reply what new Labour is doing about that. Is it going to block the directive? I want to know in terms.

The problem is not confined to anthracite; it has profound implications for the whole British coal industry and the cost of electricity. If the British coal industry, including developments in clean coal technology, is wiped out by unfair competition, the position will simply worsen. The International Energy Agency reckons that clean coal technology in the global marketplace will be worth £500 billion by 2010—in other words, real investment opportunities—and reduce carbon dioxide emissions massively. The dash for gas electricity is more expensive than the coal electricity it displaces and nuclear power has received a prodigious £8 billion since 1990.

The Government should extend the coal contracts for two years; they should undertake a fundamental review of the energy and electricity markets to assess value for customers; and they should restabilise the coal industry, which still employs 20,000 people directly and 30,000 indirectly. I dare say that it will strike Labour Members who are still present that many of those people are their own voters. The unfair German state aids for anthracite and steam coal put those people in grave danger. Those aids enable German coal producers to match world prices, even though their costs of production are much higher. Thus, British producers with far lower costs cannot break into the German market. That is a disgrace to the European Union and it is typical of the way in which the European rules are blatantly broken. No wonder the Euro-realist cause is so popular, whatever the Confederation of British Industry may say.

Based on figures produced by the Office of Electricity Regulation, it has been calculated that in 1996-97 coal contracts cost 3.92p per kWh, compared with 4.10p per kWh for electricity generated from gas by the independent power producers. Based on current gas generation into the contracted franchise market for domestic use, the dash for gas is costing customers at least £50 million a year and that will treble from next April, when coal price reductions already agreed or on offer take full effect.

There are also massive problems of unfair competition in coal emerging from China. The coal industry is bearing the financial brunt of the pollution targets to which the Prime Minister is personally committed, so it is he who is putting the industry, its management and its workers at risk. The responsibility is his.

What is new Labour doing about all this? Is it prepared to tackle the German Government? Do the Government think that German miners' jobs are more important than British miners' jobs? At Prime Minister's questions today, my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Dr. Clark) raised the issue of coal, and the Prime Minister in reply spoke of competitive prices. I hope that he will read this debate. He will see that it is a case of unfair competition; and the new Labour Government must now be in the gunsights of the hon. Members—many of them here this evening—who represent mining constituencies.

This evening there was a coal crisis all-party meeting at which I heard an enormous amount of good sense talked by advisers to the TUC, by coal management and by some Labour Members. In a few years' time, we were told, 75 per cent. of electricity will be derived from gas. It should be remembered that coal redundancies will increase public expenditure; how will the Government be able to make good the ridiculous commitment in principle, expressed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to economic and monetary union, which includes the Maastricht criteria that will continue to drive people out of work not just in the coal industry but in every sector of British manufacturing and commerce?

The encouragement given by the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry to the new gas generating plant of Saltend near Hull does not suggest that new Labour takes these issues seriously. What is the Minister's policy? Will he conduct a proper energy and electricity review? Will he

[Mr. Cash]

encourage a two-year extension of coal contracts? Will he tackle the European Commission and the German Government? I await his reply with interest.

10.11 pm

The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) on securing this Adjournment debate. He has a reputation for campaigning against anything European, but it is perhaps not so well known that he was one of the very few Conservative Members to oppose the Conservative Government's pit closure programme. He deserves credit for that, even though the opposition in the Conservative party at the time was not particularly effective. Still, the hon. Gentleman did speak out against the closures, and he raised the question of state aids. However, the Government he supported did not take much action, I seem to recall.

I should like to quote a letter sent to me by one of the companies concerned. Dated 29 October, it suggests that in the short time we have been in office we have indeed taken action:

> "As you will be aware, we are very grateful indeed for the support that we have had from you and your Department's officials on this issue"—

the issue of unfair subsidies in Europe—

> "as well as from Ministers and officials in the Welsh Office. You have taken a very robust stand in support of our position and that has been a very important factor in helping us make our case."

The letter comes from Celtic Energy. Just as I respect what the hon. Gentleman did when the Conservative Government closed the pits, he should respect the fact that we have taken action since entering government.

The United Kingdom coal industry receives no Government aid and has not done so since 1995. In Germany, Spain and, to a lesser extent, France the industry is wholly dependent on state aid. The subsidies are large; they amount in Germany to about £3 billion a year, or £40,000 for each employed miner. In Spain, the subsidy per miner is believed to be even higher.

I ask whether, in the Community outside the United Kingdom, there is a pit or coal mine—there is certainly no deep coal mine—that is viable in its own right without that support. That is important because, in accordance with a 1993 aid decision, operating aid may be given only where the undertaking receiving the aid can show the prospect of economic viability by the year 2002.

Coal production in Europe is governed by the treaty of Paris, which set up the European Coal and Steel Community treaty in 1952. The European Coal and Steel Community has a 50-year life and that framework finally falls away in the year 2002.

The treaty of Paris set out, in article 2, a requirement for the community to

> "progressively bring about the conditions which will of themselves ensure the most rational distribution of production at the highest possible level of productivity".

Article 4 prohibits

> "measures or practices which discriminate between producers, between purchasers or between consumers, especially in prices and delivery terms or transport rates and conditions".

That article also prohibits

> "subsidies or aids granted by States in any form whatsoever".

In the 1960s, an exception was made to that last prohibition, whereby aid could be paid, on an exceptional and strictly temporary basis, to coal mining activities. However, the number of cases dependent on that exceptional provision in the treaty has grown over the years.

The Commission's own 1994 report on the application of the Community rules for state aid noted that

> "British mines whose production costs were lower than those in other Member States and which were only slightly subsidised have had to be closed for lack of a market while high-cost mines are still being worked elsewhere in Europe—a situation which has helped push up the amount of aid per tonne in the Community very considerably".

One can understand the difficulties that the Commission may have had in the past in enforcing that treaty strictly. Once, all coal-producing states were giving significant aid to their industries and there was little trade in coal between the states or even the potential for trade.

I should like to suggest to the hon. Member for Stone, and the many Labour Members who have turned out for tonight's debate, that the shapes of the energy markets have changed radically, indeed massively, in the past 10, five or even two years. Here in Britain, as a result of the privatisation programme—the separation of power generation, transmission and supply, breaking the sector into separate companies, fragmenting the system so that company now competes with company—traditional levers were totally removed from the hands of Government and state.

Last week, I set in train a full review of the pool—the electricity-buying system. Why? To discover whether there is a fair and transparent market. We are also looking transdepartmentally at the point that the hon. Member for Stone raised regarding acid rain sulphur emissions. I recall that under the Conservative Government, last March, a note was sent to all the power stations, informing them of the new sulphur conditions. Yes, I and my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment are finding out the situation that we have inherited and what we can do about it to ensure that every power station in Britain, bar Drax and Ratcliffe, is not shut down as a result of the implication of such conditions.

In 1994, following the Conservative Government's coal review, British Coal's five regional coal companies and its seven care and maintenance deep mines were offered for sale. RJB Mining bought 16 deep mines. The Scottish mines were sold to Mining (Scotland) Ltd. The south Wales business was sold to Celtic Energy Ltd. and Tower colliery, a care and maintenance mine in Mid-Glamorgan, was bought out by the former employees. Coal Investments plc, which, sadly, went out of business in 1996, bought six mines, two of which were subsequently sold to Midlands Mining Ltd.; the remainder have closed. At the end of 1996, there were 27 deep mines, employing about 12,500 people in operation, and there were 91 operating opencast sites. That is the context now.

Celtic Energy, the largest producer of anthracite in south Wales, complained to the Department of Trade and Industry about the imports of graded anthracite from two German collieries: Sophia Jakoba and Ibbenburen. The complaint concerned aid that the German Government were giving to those mines for the production of anthracite intended for the German power station market. That aid was leaking out and being applied to German exports of graded anthracite to the UK. The subsidised exports had not received Commission approval for state aid. The graded anthracite was being sold at well below production cost and was being priced aggressively to undercut prevailing market prices.

Celtic pointed out the serious financial damage that was being caused not only to its operations but to small anthracite producers in south Wales, several of which sadly went out of business in 1996. The UK Government conveyed Celtic Energy's complaint to the Commission and, in August this year, the Commission sent a formal notice to the German Government asking them to justify that prima facie abuse. The notice was published in the *Official Journal* on 23 August. I emphasise that that is an important document, which sets out the Commission's interpretation of the 1993 aid decision. In the notice, the Commission concluded that the complaint lodged by Celtic and the subsequent investigation gave reason to believe that irregularities could have occurred in connection with the coal sales on the Community market by the two German companies.

The irregularities noted were, first, that the normal function of the market and of competition had been disrupted by the infringement of competition rules; secondly, that state aid had been used directly or indirectly for purposes that were distorting competition between Community producers; and, thirdly, that Germany had failed in its obligation to ensure compliance with the Commission's decisions and recommendations.

The Commission then invited other interested parties to comment. In September, my Department responded to that invitation in full. We endorsed the Commission's preliminary conclusion that the aid given in that case undermined the stability of the coal market in the Community. We agreed with the Commission that the two companies' behaviour could be considered to be unfair competitive practice.

In March 1997, Sophia Jakoba colliery closed. Celtic Energy was then able to secure a contract for the supply of Welsh anthracite to meet German markets previously supplied by that company. However, Ibbenburen continues to market its domestic anthracite aggressively, both in Britain and elsewhere in north-west Europe, in direct competition with UK producers.

At the beginning of 1997, Celtic Energy bid to supply the power station at Ibbenburen in Germany at prices that were less than half the production cost of the adjacent Ibbenburen mine. The offer was rejected. In the light of that, the Department of Trade and Industry lodged a further formal complaint to the Commission that state aid to Ibbenburen distorts competition. We drew the Commission's attention to the proposed merger of Ibbenburen with the dominant German producer, Ruhrkohle, and expressed concern that that would increase the possibility of continued abuse of state aid.

In the light of the damage to the south Wales producers caused by Ibbenburen over the past two years, the Department of Trade and Industry then invited the Commission to impose punitive financial penalties on the company. More importantly, we urged the Commission to require repayment of the state aid granted to Ibbenburen last year and the denial of any further state aid in 1997.

The current position on Celtic's complaint is, I understand, that the German Government have now replied to the Commission's formal notice and the Commission is considering its next step. We continue to urge on the Commission the need for quick action in this case because we agree that it is entirely unfair that people are being put out of business by unfair practices supported in Europe.

Ruhrkohle's collieries receive by far the largest share of German state aid. In the annual "Energy Report", which the DTI published just two months ago, I said that we were also preparing a report about the state aid paid to Ruhrkohle. There is evidence that the UK industry tried to sell coal to German power stations supplied by Ruhrkohle, at prices less than half the production costs of German mines, but the offers were rejected.

Our concerns are not just about the way in which state aid for Ruhrkohle appears to distort competition. Aid is also being given on a long-term basis as part of a plan stretching well into the year 2005. That is clearly inconsistent with the exceptional and temporary nature of any state aid allowed under the original treaty.

Perhaps most important of all, state aid for the high-cost mines cuts across the treaty requirement that the Community should be working towards a "rational distribution of production". I am sure that hon. Members would agree that it is not rational for our industries to be denied access to continental markets because of state aid. I hope that the hon. Gentleman would agree that we are taking action to tackle that.

We have recently lodged two complaints against Spain as well. The first complaint relates to the sulphur content. Spanish power stations are allowed to buy Spanish coal with a sulphur content ranging up to 6 per cent. Imported coal, however, including UK coal, is limited to a sulphur content of 1 per cent.

Even on the rules of the game relating to environmental constraints, different rules are being applied, and we will continue to challenge that as a clear case of discrimination. There is some evidence that it has deterred producers from seeking opportunities in European markets. We hope that we can get the Commission to move quickly on these matters.

The second complaint is more fundamental. We have objected, among other things, to the long-term payments of state aid to mines that clearly have no hope of economic viability. The Commission is considering that complaint as well, and we hope that our complaints about Spanish and German companies are being taken seriously.

I hope that Spanish producers and their German counterparts will co-operate with UK producers to identify ways of achieving a more rational distribution of production in the Community, so that one producer does not drive out another by unfair competition. We will continue to press for urgent action.

I shall mention Poland, although it is not yet a member of the European Community. It is looking to join the EC. Its behaviour on state aid is therefore governed to some extent by the treaties of the European Coal and Steel Community treaty. Poland is expected to supply about half a million tonnes to this country in 1997. Some of that is house coal, but some is for power stations and industry.

[Mr. John Battle]

We are examining carefully the extent to which Polish coal is being sold in our markets at prices below production costs and driving out UK production. The position is not wholly clear, but we will pursue the matter vigorously.

Let me sum up by referring to a written answer that I gave to the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), in which I stated:

> "I mean to press for the elimination of all coal subsidies throughout the European coal and steel community by the time the ECSC is wound up in 2002, and I will support the Commission vigorously in ensuring progressive reduction in state aid paid to the European coal industry over this period."—[*Official Report*, 10 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. *420*.]

It is not our policy to allow subsidies in Germany, Spain, Poland or elsewhere to adversely affect the UK coal industry. I hope that hon. Members will recognise that within weeks of taking office, our Government took practical action to tackle the unfair competition with which European coal threatens us.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the coal contracts. I note that the negotiations between one of the companies—RJB Mining—and the generators are continuing. The outcome may not be known for some weeks. I understand that other producers have successfully concluded their contracts. I hope that the contracts that RJB is negotiating for after March next year can be concluded. Tackling unfair competition in Europe is not a substitute for RJB Mining negotiating those post-March contracts with the power generators.

The Government are considering how we can encourage the introduction of competitive clean coal technology. We have done the joined-up thinking between what was going on in energy, science research and environmental technology to see how we can promote that as an option for a viable coal future.

In the utility review we are reviewing the entire gas and electricity market. We are tackling renewable energy as a means of meeting our targets for carbon dioxide. We are working to make our policy diverse, secure and sustainable. It is not easy in a world where the levers were removed by the previous Government. Sadly, despite the hon. Gentleman's honourable efforts on behalf of the coal industry and the people working in it, when the Government of the day made those decisions, he could not win the argument, and we have been left with the legacy of those decisions. Even in the short time that we have had, we have been working hard to tackle that legacy and to try to ensure a viable future.

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 30 October 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

For the borough constituency of Beckenham in the room of Piers Rolf Garfield Merchant Esquire, who since his election for the said borough constituency has accepted the office of steward or bailiff of Her Majesty's Manor of Northstead in the county of York.—[*Mr. Peter Ainsworth.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Spending Allocations

1. **Mr. Edward Davey:** What discussions his Department has had with the Department for Education and Employment regarding its spending allocations for 1997–98 and 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [12648]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alistair Darling): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and I have many discussions with each other. The House will be aware that, as a result of the windfall tax on the privatised utilities, we were able to allocate almost £4 billion to the Department for Education and Employment, including £1.3 billion to refurbish and repair schools. In addition to that, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was able to allocate a further £1 billion for schools spending next year.

Mr. Davey: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his reply. Does he not accept, however, that because of the difficult overall financial position of local authorities, councils will find it very hard to pass on increases in education spending to schools in full other than by slashing spending on social services? Will he therefore consider either abolishing capping completely, or making minor changes—for instance, introducing a separate and higher cap just for education spending?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman will no doubt recall that we discussed those matters when I visited his party conference in Eastbourne, but, whatever other effects I had there, my message clearly did not get through to him.

It is necessary for the Government to keep tight control of public spending if we are to achieve the stability that we need for the good of the country's economic future, and if we are to be able to put public spending on a sustainable footing in the future. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor made £1 billion available for front-line teaching next year, from which many local authorities—and, most important, many parents and pupils—will benefit. We make no bones about the fact that the next two years will be very hard, and hard choices will have to be made; but we believe that that is essential if we are to benefit schools in the future.

I should add, for the hon. Gentleman's benefit, that by abolishing the assisted places scheme we have ensured that extra money, over and above the sums to which I have referred, goes into the classrooms where the money counts.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Will the Chief Secretary confirm that higher inflation since the general election has cut the value of public expenditure? In particular, he will be aware that written parliamentary answers from his Department show that revenue spending on education and training will be lower this year than was planned by the previous Government. Does he also agree that next year total public expenditure will also be lower than we planned for the same reasons? Given that these have been confirmed in writing by his Department, will the Chief Secretary take this opportunity to confirm both these points about education expenditure this year and general expenditure next year, and will he do it clearly and without evasion?

Mr. Darling: I knew that the Tories were now the caring party but it seems that they are now the party of public expenditure, which will come as some news not just to the House but to people outside. Of course I am aware of the parliamentary answer to which the right hon. Gentleman refers because I answered it. Surely he must accept two things. First, he cannot possibly say that the spending totals that have been allocated for this year were inadequate because it was his party that allocated them before it left office. Secondly, inflation has increased because the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues failed to take any action to restrain the inflationary pressures in the economy when they had ample opportunity to do so before the last election. That is the legacy that we all have to live with, and we are tackling it through a number of measures.

Petrol Tax

2. **Mr. Stunell:** In which year since 1967 the total tax per litre of petrol represented the highest proportion of average male earnings, and in which year the lowest; and if he will make a statement. [12649]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Dawn Primarolo): Tax per litre of petrol as a proportion of average male earnings was highest in the period that the hon. Gentleman asks about—1967—although it is currently higher than it has been at any point since 1982 and it is rising due to the commitment on the fuel duty escalator.

Mr. Stunell: Does the Minister agree that the figures give scope for turning the projected green Budget this autumn into a genuinely green Budget through the reduction of VAT on insulation materials and a compensating change in fuel tax? That would be fiscally neutral and would environmentally help the Prime Minister to reach the target that he has set for the reduction of carbon emissions.

Dawn Primarolo: I should remind the hon. Gentleman that the commitments on the fuel duty escalator will by 2010 bring in another £2.5 million towards our CO_2 target for reducing emissions. His party should make up its mind about where it stands on fuel duty. One minute the Liberal Democrats tell us that they are against rises because they say that such rises damage rural communities, and the next minute they tell us to put them up even higher to save the environment. Which one is it?

Mr. Green: What is the cost to the ambulance service and the police service of the Chancellor's Budget decision to put a 1p higher rate of increase on petrol duty and to advance its date? The Financial Secretary will be aware that that is causing severe difficulties for important public services and adding to the resource problems caused by the Budget.

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman should be congratulating us on giving an extra £300 million to the health service this year and £1.1 billion next year, which will adequately cope with its expenses.

Mr. William Ross: While the intention to have a green Budget may be laudable, those who live in the greenest parts of the United Kingdom—the rural areas—have great difficulty in meeting the constantly rising costs of fuel. What do the Government intend to do about that large group of people for whom cars are a necessity?

Dawn Primarolo: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Government cut VAT on fuel precisely to assist people to keep warm. In assessing future taxes in connection with the environment, the Government must be sure that they are contributing to the CO_2 reduction target. Irrespective of where people live they are not excluded from involvement in reaching that target.

Mr. Swinney: Since the Budget was announced in July, has the Minister given any further consideration to developing differential pricing for petrol as between rural and urban communities, and in some way using the duty to influence that proposal?

Dawn Primarolo: Is that yet another policy? The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no.

Private Finance Initiative (Schools)

3. **Mr. Fabian Hamilton:** What assessment he has made of the effect of the reformed private finance initiative on projects for schools. [12650]

The Paymaster General (Mr. Geoffrey Robinson): The House will be pleased to know that the reformed private finance initiative is making good progress on all fronts, particularly schools. Four of the six prioritised projects identified by the Department of Health were for schools. I imagine that my hon. Friend has one particularly in mind.

Mr. Hamilton: I thank the Paymaster General for that reply. Will he give us an assurance that the valuable development work in PFI Pathfinder schools such as Cardinal Heenan Roman Catholic high school in my constituency—surprise, surprise—will act as a model for the capital investment that is urgently needed in many school buildings?

Mr. Robinson: My hon. Friend is right. Cardinal Heenan is an important Pathfinder school. He will remember that I met its headmaster, the chair of governors and the leader of Leeds local education authority at my office here and that good progress is being made. My hon. Friend will also be aware that Pathfinder projects generally are going well. The Department for Education and Employment is extending great support to that school and I believe that a preferred bidder is shortly to be announced.

Mr. Yeo: How many schools will close and how many teachers will be sacked because of the Government's introduction of a tax on the dividend income of pension funds? Will the Government now give a cast-iron guarantee that councils will be given extra cash next year to meet the higher pension contributions that result from the Government's Budget in July?

Mr. Robinson: I am not sure how that question arises, but let me assure—*[Interruption.]* I am very pleased that it has arisen. Let me assure the hon. Gentleman that, over the next four years, we are putting £1.3 billion into school buildings. The education budget has been increased and share prices are still higher than at the time of the building, so there has been none of the impact that he wanted perhaps and direly predicted.

UK Investment

4. **Mr. Livingstone:** What estimate he has made of when United Kingdom investment as a proportion of gross domestic product will reach the average level for the EU as a whole. [12651]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The higher investment that we seek to meet the Government's objective of high and stable employment and growth requires stability as well as the specific measures that the new Government have taken to encourage long-term investment. The Treasury's economic assessment of Britain in Europe, published on Monday, suggests that to be outside economic and monetary union in the long term could damage investment. That is one of the reasons why we support the principle of a single currency.

Mr. Livingstone: May I start by recording my appreciation to the Chancellor for his wise decision to create a vacancy on Labour's National Executive Committee? Does he agree that the major reason why the British economy is weak and is not capable of joining the currency union is that the former Government neglected investment? Year by year, we were consistently recording investment levels that were barely 75 per cent. of the European average.

Mr. Brown: I agree with my hon. Friend on his second point. For 20 years, British investment compared with that in Europe has been lower than it should have been. With our cuts in corporation tax and our investment incentives, we intend to raise investment, but what would be most damaging, particularly for inward investment into Europe, would be to reject in principle the idea of a single currency. Thirty per cent. of inward investment in Europe, 40 per cent. of Japanese investment in Europe and 50 per cent. of Korean investment in Europe comes to Britain. The Conservative party should answer this question: why does it oppose the principle of a single currency? If the economic reasons for a single currency are compelling, why will it not support it in the national interest?

Mr. Townend: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that it is the quality, as much as the quantity, of investment that matters? How does the return on investment in the United Kingdom compare with average return on investment in other European Union countries?

Mr. Brown: Of course it is the quality of investment that matters, but there has to be investment in the first place. I heard the hon. Gentleman on the radio talking about the single currency and his principled objection to it and I must tell him that we would not be serving the cause of British industry or investment in Britain well if we opposed in principle a single currency. To improve the quality of investment requires, first, that there is investment. The Conservative party's policies would ruin the possibility of more investment in our country.

Mr. David Taylor: Is the Chancellor aware that his clear line on the single currency has had the unforeseen effect of trapping four British nationals in an alien organisation? Would he care to comment on the dreadful plight of the hon. Members for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor), and for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris), the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)? Will he urge his ministerial colleagues to refer their case to the International Court of Justice which, unfortunately, sits at The Hague?

Madam Speaker: Order. As the Chancellor knows, he has very little responsibility for that, but perhaps he could pick one or two bones from that flesh.

Mr. Brown: It is just as well that I have no responsibility for the Conservative party in its present condition. My hon. Friend has made a point which is emphasised by the former Conservative spokesman on Northern Ireland who talked about the damage to business that would be caused by objecting to a single currency. He said that our businesses need to prepare for Europe urgently. That is the man who, until yesterday, sat on the Front Bench for the Conservative party.

Only this morning the former Deputy Prime Minister said that the Conservative party was now at war with business. I must ask the Conservative party whether it supports the principle of a single currency—yes or no. If the economic reasons for it are compelling, why does the Conservative party object to it when it is in the national economic interest?

Profit-related Pay

5. **Mr. Fabricant:** If he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy concerning the taxation of profit-related pay. [12652]

Mr. Darling: We believe that profit-related pay should be taxable, like bonus pay and other, similar forms of remuneration.

Mr. Fabricant: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he recall that, before the general election, his right hon. Friend, the current Prime Minister, visited John Lewis in Oxford street and said that it was a good example—as is the whole John Lewis Partnership—of a stakeholding society? Does he also recall—as far as I recall he was not present in the Committee considering the Finance Bill immediately prior to the general election—that the Labour party spokesman on that Committee said that the Labour party would immediately restore profit-related pay? Is he aware of how betrayed the 34,000 members of the John Lewis Partnership and other such schemes feel because of the lie that we heard in that Committee? Will he now apologise to the members of the John Lewis Partnership and to others who formerly benefited from profit-related pay tax breaks for breaking yet another election promise?

Mr. Darling: If I set aside the hon. Gentleman's rather intemperate remarks, perhaps I can put him right on a number of matters. First, at no time did anyone in the Finance Bill Committee promise, on behalf of the Labour party, that profit-related pay would be restored. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I was present and, as the then shadow Chief Secretary, had anyone said that, it would probably have been the last thing they would have said on behalf of the Labour party because of the cost involved. What the hon. Gentleman has said is simply not true.

Secondly, John Lewis has an excellent scheme and I am pleased that it has said that it will continue with it. The hon. Gentleman should not make the mistake of believing that a scheme will work only if there is a tax break to go with it. Many employers have schemes that do not rely on tax breaks. The final point that the hon. Gentleman might wish to bear in mind is that, as the parliamentary private secretary to the then Financial Secretary, he voted to abolish the profit-related pay scheme. Therefore, he is in no position to lecture us.

Mr. MacShane: I was present at all the sittings of the Finance Bill Committee and I can confirm what my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary has said. If the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) had got his hair out of his ears, he would have noted that too.

I invite my right hon. Friend to address the question of employee involvement. Has he seen the remarkable evidence from the United States of the success of employee share ownership schemes? More than 10,000 companies, covering 11 million employees, are now owned partly or wholly by their employees. They are profitable, they are creating jobs and they are adding share value.

Could we have a little more enthusiasm from the Treasury, in contrast with the pathetic lip service paid by the previous Government to ESOPs—employee share ownership plans—on the need to get shares into the hands of employees and to get employees directly involved in the ownership and running of their companies?

Mr. Darling: I recall my hon. Friend's contributions on that subject during the Finance Bill—some of them were in Latin. Even though we may not have understood some of what he was saying, we could at least see the enthusiasm with which he said it.

The Government are keen to encourage employee participation in every possible way. We believe that it is very much a part of the stakeholder democracy. Companies that involve their employees, in whatever way is appropriate, ensure that their employees share in the success of their companies and feel part of the common effort. That is something we want to encourage. However, I repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant)—a tax break is not the only way to encourage that change of culture.

Competitiveness

6. **Mr. Kirkwood:** What steps he proposes to take to protect the competitiveness of exporting manufacturers in the United Kingdom from the adverse effects of high levels of sterling; and if he will make a statement. [12653]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The Government wish to see a stable and competitive pound over the medium term, consistent with our objective of price stability. One key route to United Kingdom export success is to ensure that there is no return to the boom and bust that we saw over the 18 years of the previous Government. We need to allow companies to plan ahead and to be competitive in the marketplace.

Mr. Kirkwood: I well understand the sentiment behind the Minister's answer. However, is she really aware of the damage to manufacturing exporters caused by the high level of the pound? She will be aware that during the past seven days, Pringle of Scotland—a company that exports the vast bulk of its knitwear—has announced 300 job losses in the Scottish borders.

Will the hon. Lady use her good offices, working with the Minister for Education and Industry in the Scottish Office, to try to produce a package of measures for the communities affected—Hawick, Berwick-upon-Tweed and Galashiels—and to try to save what is left of the knitwear industry and diversify for the future? Will she find time to meet a small delegation from the senior management of Pringle, so that she may hear at first hand about some of the exchange rate difficulties that the company is facing?

Mrs. Liddell: Manufacturing exports are still rising, but I take the hon. Gentleman's point about Pringle. I have been following the matter in the Scottish press. I commend the hon. Gentleman on his prompt action in contacting my office. I will be happy to meet a delegation from the company, and whoever else it wishes to bring, to discuss these matters. I am sure that my hon. Friends in the Scottish Office will be only too happy to join in that meeting.

Mr. Stevenson: Does my hon. Friend agree that a core economic issue is how to control inflation while also controlling interest rates and exchange rates? Is she aware that in my Stoke-on-Trent constituency about 500 jobs have been lost over the past six months? If she further aware that one of the main reasons cited for that by the pottery industry, which exports 80 per cent. of its products, is the exchange rate? Will she review economic policy and take fully into account the growing and serious concern about the effect of the exchange rate on manufacturing industry?

Mrs. Liddell: The Government fully understand and share the concerns of industry and exporters. However, it is important to remember the significance of ensuring that this country does not return to the boom and bust cycle. I recognise the problems in my hon. Friend's constituency, but since the peak in July there has been a reduction in the value of the pound against other currencies. On his point about reviewing economic policy, I remind him that the economic policy that we have embarked on since we were elected on 1 May is aimed at bringing long-term stability to the economy. By bringing long-term stability, which was so lacking under the previous Government, we hope to get on to the sort of economic footing that will ensure that the vicissitudes of the marketplace that are occurring in my hon. Friend's constituency cease to have the same impact.

Mr. Ruffley: Given the Government's commitment in principle to joining economic and monetary union, will they give a commitment also, in principle, to joining the exchange rate mechanism? If they will not, will it not be merely another example of the Government running scared of British public opinion?

Mrs. Liddell: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made it perfectly clear that we have no intention of joining the ERM.

Mr. Skinner: Is it not also true to say that, in a highly technological world, people who export must also import if they are to provide their exports? There is an argument about swings and roundabouts in the value of the pound, and we should take no notice of those tinpot Liberals. We should remember that previous Labour Governments have devalued the pound, and previous Labour Governments have not managed to secure a second full term in office.

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend is right in the points that he makes about the Liberals, who are consistent on nothing. I take the point that he makes, and I can assure the House that the Government intend to secure an economy that is on a stable and sound footing.

Mr. Lilley: Further to the answer that the Economic Secretary to the Treasury gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmonds (Mr. Ruffley), does she recall the Chancellor saying that the Maastricht criteria should be applied without fudging? She will be aware that one of the treaty criteria is participation for two years in the exchange rate mechanism without devaluing against member currencies. Will she explain why the Government do not think that it is in Britain's interests to rejoin the exchange rate mechanism?

Mrs. Liddell: The right hon. Gentleman asks an intriguing question. The criterion is exchange rate stability. The House will be interested to learn from him, however, what action the Conservative party is prepared to take, and which faction of the Conservative party has the ascendancy this afternoon as distinct from this morning.

Mr. Lilley: The Economic Secretary might consult the treaty to learn that the criterion is participation in

"the Exchange Rate Mechanism . . . for at least two years, without devaluing against the currency of any other member state."

She has not answered the question why she believes that a two-year apprenticeship in the exchange rate mechanism would be damaging for Britain, whereas a lifelong membership of the more onerous single currency will automatically be in our interests.

Mrs. Liddell: I will answer the question quite clearly so that the right hon. Gentleman can understand it: the issue is exchange rate stability. I wonder whether he would care to answer my question about the position of the Tory party today.

Business Fluctuations

7. **Dr. Iddon:** What steps he is taking to end major fluctuations in the business cycle. [12654]

Mr. Darling: The Government have taken decisive action to strengthen economic stability. As my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary said, the damaging boom and bust legacy that we inherited has been extremely damaging to British industry. We attach great importance to stability, openness and transparency of policy—because from them flows the credibility that world markets now demand.

Dr. Iddon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government have established a framework for monetary policy that is transparent, accountable and the best in the world? Does he agree also that the monetary policy reforms signal the Government's intention to get away from the boom and bust policies and short-termism of the past, allowing the United Kingdom to take decisions with the long-term interests of the economy rather than political expediency in mind? Does he think that the Conservatives will support the Bank of England Bill?

Mr. Darling: If Conservative Members cannot tell us their policy on the European single currency, perhaps they can tell us their policy on supporting the Bank of England Bill, which was introduced earlier this week; we shall see. My hon. Friend is quite right that we must have stability if we are to put the economy on a long-term footing and create an environment that encourages investment and increases prosperity. Our reforms—which the Bank of England Bill will soon introduce—are a part of that process. Those reforms must be considered alongside the actions taken this year by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his Budget, which were geared to achieving long-term stability, reducing the high debt level that had been encouraged and creating a climate in which British business can flourish.

Mr. Flight: Does the Minister accept the view of the International Monetary Fund that exchange rate flexibility is necessary to cushion business cycles, as has been witnessed recently in south-east Asia? The view has also been relevant to Europe and America over the past few years, and is supported by most central bankers.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman seems to forget that it was his party which took this country into the exchange rate mechanism, although it seems that the Conservatives are now collectively sorry for it. I am happy to accept that the IMF has been complimentary about the conduct of the economy in the hands of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Domestic Fuel (VAT)

8. **Mrs. Mahon:** If he will make a statement on the reduction in VAT on domestic fuel. [12655]

9. **Mr. Ruane:** What representations he has received on his reduction in VAT on domestic fuel from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent. [12657]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The change to a 5 per cent. rate on VAT came into effect on 1 September, benefiting all households well in time for winter fuel bills. This honours our manifesto commitment to the people of Britain.

Mrs. Mahon: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that the manifesto pledge that we kept will stop the obscenity of pensioners having to choose between eating and heating?

Mr. Brown: Not only have we cut VAT on fuel but we have abolished the gas levy. At the same time, in our welfare-to-work programme we are introducing an insulation programme to enable elderly people to insulate their homes against the winter cold. These measures add up in only 18 weeks to far more than the previous Government did in 18 years.

Mr. Ruane: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments. My constituency, Vale of Clwyd, has the second highest number of pensioners in Wales, and his announcement will go down well there. Does my right hon. Friend have any further proposals to promote warmer homes, such as a reduction in VAT on insulation schemes?

Mr. Brown: That is part of a review that we promised at the time of the Budget—and, indeed, before the election—which will report soon. As for the measures that we are taking to protect elderly people against the winter cold and to enable them to have better insulated homes, the environmental task force being set up under the welfare-to-work programme will have a significant role to play. I accept that for elderly people, whose fuel bills are a far higher proportion of their income and expenditure, Government action is necessary. However, I remind my hon. Friend that if the Conservative party had had its way, VAT on fuel would have been 17½ per cent.—it was the Labour party that stopped it rising to 17½ and then reduced it to 5 per cent.

Mr. Robathan: How does the Chancellor balance the electorally popular measure of reducing VAT on fuel with the hard choices, about which the Prime Minister spoke, involved in reducing carbon emissions? Is not the policy of reducing VAT on fuel in direct contradiction to the hard choices involved in reducing carbon emissions and the incremental growth in taxation on petrol?

Mr. Brown: If the hon. Gentleman is saying that the policy is in direct contradiction to the objective of energy efficiency, I assume that the Conservative party is pledging at the next election to raise VAT on fuel from 5 per cent. to 8 per cent. and perhaps to 17½ per cent. When the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman rises to speak, perhaps he will tell us what the Conservative policy is. Only a few minutes ago, when talking about the environment, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary spelled out all the measures that have been taken to honour the Prime Minister's commitment on the environment. We are an environmentally friendly Government who are dealing with the problems of energy efficiency and insulation.

Mr. Boswell: Before the Chancellor overdoses on self-congratulation, will he confirm, as the Economy Secretary has already done in the House, that had he not deftly chosen to manipulate the implementation date of the reduction in VAT on fuel—introducing it on 1 September, before the pensions uprating, rather than after it on 1 October—the state pension would have risen next April by an additional £6.23 per year for a pensioner couple and £3.90 per year for a single pensioner? Has not his manoeuvring taken that money directly out of the pockets of pensioners?

Mr. Brown: Here we see the Conservative party in action. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] It is about time the Conservatives listened to what is happening. They are saying again that VAT on fuel should not have been reduced in September and that we should have waited longer, letting pensioners suffer during the winter. We were not prepared to do that.

Inflation

10. **Mr. Beith:** If he will make a statement about the impact of inflation on his public expenditure projections. [12658]

Mr. Darling: Public expenditure figures are based on cash planning. A key principle of spending control for two decades has been that there should be no automatic adjustments for inflation, because that would just build inflation into the system. We are committed to controlling public expenditure and keeping a firm grip on inflation.

Mr. Beith: Nevertheless, so that false expectations are not aroused, will the Chief Secretary confirm that, even with the very welcome extra £270 million, the national health service budget will be £150 million lower in real terms than was planned by the previous Government?

Mr. Darling: As I said earlier, we are committed to maintaining tight control over public expenditure. That is very important if we are to put the public finances on a sound long-term footing. No one could accuse us—or me in particular—of raising false expectations. I have never shrunk from saying that some hard choices will have to be made during the next two years. However, we have allocated an additional £300 million for the health service for the coming winter and an extra £1.2 billion for next year. That money would not have been available had the Conservatives still been in office. The health service will benefit greatly from that, as it will from other measures that we are taking to improve patient care.

Mr. Paice: Will the Chief Secretary tell the House the precise impact on inflation of his right hon. Friend's Budget this summer?

Mr. Darling: As the hon. Gentleman will know, I have answered many parliamentary questions to his colleagues, and perhaps even to him, in which I have made that clear. We have given real-terms increases to health and education, which will benefit patients and people in schools. I am not prepared to take lectures from the Conservatives, who left public finances in a ruinous state and left record levels of debt, having doubled the national debt over six years. Their failure to take action to control inflation has meant that we have had to make tough choices and take the necessary action that they ducked on every occasion.

Single Currency

11. **Mr. Rammell:** How he proposes to further the public debate on the implications of a single currency. [12659]

Mr. Gordon Brown: In addition to publishing a guide to economic and monetary union, with a special edition as a guide for business, the Government are preparing for economic and monetary union by setting up a steering group, led by the president of the Confederation of British Industry, the Governor of the Bank of England, the chairman of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, and Ministers. We are also planning sectoral and regional consultations on the single currency to start from January.

Mr. Rammell: I thank my right hon. Friend for that response and congratulate him on his statement this week, which was the most positive statement on economic and monetary union that we have heard from a British Government. Does my right hon. Friend agree with the Tory Reform Group, which stated this morning that the Leader of the Opposition's tactics on EMU have united the Government and business against the Conservative party?

Mr. Brown: I quite understand my hon. Friend's remarks. Because the Conservatives cannot tell us whether they support the principle of a single currency or whether they will put a national economic test above all others, they have lost the support of business. They are the anti-business party in Britain today. Confirmation of that, if it was needed, has come from the Tory Reform Group and the remarks of the right hon. Member for

Henley (Mr. Heseltine), the former Deputy Prime Minister, who said this morning that the Conservative party is at war with business.

Dr. Julian Lewis: In the light of his repeated comments this week that all that matters are the economic tests, will the Chancellor explain what he would do if other countries went ahead with economic and monetary union and—against the expectations of people on both sides of the House, including me—it succeeded economically but the tests failed democratically? What would the Government's view be if a new regime emerged that destroyed the democratic freedoms of those countries?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand my statement on Monday. I said that we supported the principle, that we would apply economic tests, that national economic interests would be decisive in the Government's recommendation and that the people would have the final say. The hon. Gentleman should tell us whether his party supports the principle of a single currency or not. I understand that Conservative Members went to Eastbourne to sort the matter out in what they called sessions for bonding. I gather that they were split up into small groups—and that is literally the position in which they are now.

Mr. Winnick: I am aware of all the fiscal constraints involved. Arising from what my right hon. Friend has just said, is there not a case for public money being used for another prolonged bonding session for the Conservative party so that it can try to sort out the issue? May I also suggest that it could be held at Henley and that a few more records of wartime songs could be thrown in at evening sessions?

Mr. Brown: I offer the shadow Chancellor the chance—with your permission, Madam Speaker—to tell us whether he supports the principle of a single currency or not. Within the Conservative party, there is now a five-year group, a 10-year group, a 30-year group and a group that will never go into the single currency. If the Conservative party does not support a single currency for the foreseeable future, it will not be a single party for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Chancellor accept that many in this country believe that economic tests are the only basis on which a decision to join a single currency should be made? It is conceivable that those tests may arise within this Parliament. Will the Chancellor accept, therefore, that it is imperative to mobilise public opinion to ensure that we get support for a commitment to enter a single currency? Does he agree that the split within the Conservative party at least creates the opportunity for a cross-party campaign that can ensure a yes vote in a referendum whenever it comes?

Mr. Brown: I respect the hon. Gentleman's long-standing commitment to a single currency. I think, however, that on reflection, he will agree that getting it right is more important than getting it quickly. If he believes, as I do, that the economic tests must be met and that we need a sustainable and durable period of convergence, he must accept that that will take time. What he found on Monday was a Government prepared to make the preparations. I hope that he will support us, not only in the standing committee that will deal with the preparations for monetary union, but in our attempt to inform and to show the people of Britain what monetary union can mean. What happened on Monday is that we were the first Government who were prepared to support the principle of a single currency. We are still waiting for an answer from the Conservative party.

Mr. Todd: In the Chancellor's welcome statement on Monday, he addressed the lack of convergence between our economy and that of our European neighbours. Will he give some information on how we shall measure that convergence over the next few years, picking out particularly the element of interest rates, on which he laid so much emphasis?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We have laid down five economic tests. They include investment and what impact the single currency will have on it, whether there is sufficient flexibility to withstand shocks, whether the business cycles are convergent, and the impact on jobs. We can set these tests down because we have been prepared to say that we support the principle of a single currency. Until we clarify the Opposition's position—do they support a single currency or not—we cannot move further in understanding it. The leader of the Conservative party said at one stage:

> "We should say very clearly that we have principled objections to a European single currency. If in some future decade, that is no longer the case . . . "

He is a Conservative leader who has principles for one decade, but who may drop them in the next. That is the sort of party we are dealing with.

Mr. Nicholls: If, as is inevitable, there comes a point when the interests of this country are not the same as the interests of the rest of Europe, whose interests does the Chancellor think will prevail in this brave new world—the interests of this country or the interests of the rest of Europe?

Mr. Brown: It is precisely because we have set national economic tests for Britain which have to be met that we can say that the decision will be made in the national economic interest. Even if the economic arguments for a single currency were compelling and it was in the national interest to go in, the Conservatives cannot say that they would recommend doing so. I suggest that they return to Eastbourne and have another bonding session to see whether they can sort things out.

Interest Rates

12. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** If he will make a statement on the level of interest rates. [12660]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Interest rates are now set by the Bank of England with the aim of meeting the Government's inflation target. I am satisfied that the new arrangements will deliver long-term price stability and prevent a return to the cycle of boom and bust.

Dr. Jones: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government need to give high priority to policies that will reduce interest rates and improve the competitiveness of the pound in preparation for joining the single currency? Would not the prospect of Britain joining sooner put us in a strong bargaining position to argue for a slowing down of the bandwagon to 1999?

Mr. Brown: We have made it absolutely clear that it is not practical for Britain to join in 1999, as the economic tests that we have set are not being met.

As for the level of interest rates now set by the Bank of England, we inherited circumstances in which inflation was about to rise as a result of the previous Government's failure to take action. We are not prepared to contemplate pursuing the same stop-go boom and bust policies that bedevilled the country for the past 20 years under a Conservative Government and were responsible for thousands of jobs and businesses being lost unnecessarily as a result of recession. That is why we took the action that we did and made the Bank of England independent and put it in operational charge of interest rates.

We still need an answer. Is the Conservative party now opposing our proposals to give independence to the Bank of England?

Mr. Wilkinson: Is it not one thing to have an independent national central bank, namely the Bank of England, but constitutionally and practically quite another for our interest rates to be controlled by an independent, unaccountable central bank in Frankfurt over which the British people have no democratic control whatsoever and whose actions could decimate British jobs and do incalculable harm in this country? How can the Chancellor continue to say that there are no constitutional implications to a single currency?

Mr. Brown: I take it that we have the answer to at least one of my questions: the hon. Gentleman is opposed to the principle of a single currency. On Monday I made it clear that there was a pooling of economic sovereignty involved—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) wants to follow the debate, he should really be in the Chamber and look at the issues. I said quite clearly on Monday, as he will acknowledge, that a pooling of economic sovereignty was involved. We have to ask ourselves whether there is a constitutional bar to economic and monetary union as a result. We say no. What does the hon. Gentleman say?

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Mr. Bob Blizzard.

Beer Imports

14. **Mr. Blizzard:** What steps he will take to recover revenue lost from bootleg imports of beer. [12662]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government take excise smuggling and fraud very seriously. Customs is currently deploying additional officers to front-line work in the Dover area to counter those involved.

Mr. Blizzard: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Brewers in my constituency will welcome the deployment of extra staff and the review of the matter. Does my hon. Friend agree, however, that the scale of bootlegging is so large that French beer occupies about 5 per cent. of the British market and 70 per cent. of it is smuggled beer? That represents a huge loss to the public purse and a huge threat to the British brewing industry and to jobs. It is also resulting in gangs being involved in violent criminal activity. Does my hon. Friend accept that the root cause of the problem is the large differential between the rates of duty on French and British beer? Will she therefore seriously consider the case put to the Treasury that if beer duty were reduced by 20 per cent., within three years there would be a net gain to the Exchequer and an increase in employment of some 60,000 jobs?

Dawn Primarolo: As I have said to my hon. Friend, to put the matter in proportion, the loss to the Treasury from smuggling was something like £120 million in 1996-97, against a total income of £4.9 billion in duties from beer. That estimate is based on figures agreed by the brewers. Although my hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the problems of growing crime and its associations with extensive importing of French beer, the answer is not harmonisation of duty rates. The answer is collaboration, as we have demonstrated through the review that we have set up to tackle excise fraud, to deal with crime and competitive issues and address health issues.

Frankly, I find the idea that we could cut our duties—as the brewers propose—and lose £3 billion in revenue and somehow make that up in increased consumption in three years a little hard to believe.

Miss McIntosh: Is the Minister prepared to look at the facts and figures provided by the Wines and Spirits Association, which confirm the point made by the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) that millions of pounds are lost to the Treasury from bootleg imports not only of beer but of wine and spirits, including the produce of the Chancellor's and my own country, Scottish whisky? Most of the duty on Scottish whisky is lost through bootlegging. Does the Minister agree that it is a misuse of public resources to increase the use of agents to apprehend bootleggers and that, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, the money could go to the Revenue as genuine income?

Dawn Primarolo: When the Conservative Government reduced duty on Scottish whisky, the producers responded by putting up the price, not putting it down. If the case was so strong that a price reduction was necessary to assist in combating smuggling, perhaps they should have reflected on the increase before they implemented it. All producers—of wine, spirits and beer—are actively involved in the Government's review. Discussions are under way about the exact scale of the problem and agreement will be reached in solving it in partnership between industry and Government.

Economic Stability

15. **Mr. Cranston:** What measures he is taking to strengthen economic stability in the United Kingdom. [12663]

Mrs. Liddell: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has already made clear this afternoon, the Government have taken decisive steps to strengthen economic stability. In May, we established the new framework for monetary policy, giving operational independence to the Bank of England. In July, my right hon. Friend introduced the deficit reduction plan, based on tough fiscal rules, designed to put public finances on a sustainable course.

Mr. Cranston: Does my hon. Friend agree that market expectations indicate that interest rates will go down next year and that, since May, long-term interest rates have gone down by 1 per cent.? Does that not show that the measures taken by the Government since May have directly encouraged economic stability?

Mrs. Liddell: The measures taken by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor were aimed at the long term. In fact, since his announcement in May, long-term interest rates have fallen. The Government are seeking to bring about a climate of stability which was sadly lacking. All of us remember the Ken and Eddie show, when interest rates went up, went down and then went up again. That is not a sustainable way to run an economy. In the long term, we hope that companies and individuals will be able to plan ahead with a degree of consensus, with politics taken out of the setting of interest rates.

Mr. Brooke: If the Government claimed to be so clear and so economically stable on Monday, why did the markets so misunderstand them in the previous 30 days?

Mrs. Liddell: Given that share values are up since May, I find the right hon. Gentleman's point rather difficult to take. The action that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor took in giving operational independence to the Bank of England has been widely welcomed. The only answer that we cannot get is whether the Conservative party is prepared to support the Bank of England Bill. Conservative Members have been asked three or four times this afternoon for a response but have failed to give one.

Taxation

16. **Mr. Sheerman:** If he will assess the advantages of applying taxes to resources rather than labour. [12664]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's statement of intent on environmental taxes, issued in the July Budget, demonstrates our commitment to the use of economic instruments to achieve environmental objectives. However, we will look at the advantages and disadvantages of taxes on a case-by-case basis. In each case, it is important to consider all the effects of a tax, including its distributional impacts, and any implications for competitiveness.

Mr. Sheerman: My hon. Friend will know that the decision by the Chancellor to examine the issue of environmental taxation seriously, rather than going for a quick fix, was widely welcomed. I ask the Government to continue the work on environmental taxation and to consider—with no prejudice—the landfill tax introduced by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) in his penultimate Budget. It has been very effective in changing the environment. I hope that we can build on that rather than ignoring it.

Dawn Primarolo: I confirm that the cross-party support for the introduction of the landfill tax, which has been a successful measure—its first year of operation is currently being reviewed by the Government—is an excellent example of how an environmental tax can work.

Mr. Gibb: Given the European Union tax harmonisation proposals, which were discussed by the Chancellor at the recent Economic and Finance Council meeting, is it the Government's long-term intention to hand over direct tax policy to Brussels? Or will the Financial Secretary today commit the Government to vetoing those proposals at the next ECOFIN meeting?

Dawn Primarolo: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, we have a veto and we have always declared our intention to use it when that best serves British interests.

Counter-terrorism Legislation

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, Madam Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the Government's plans for reforming the existing framework of counter-terrorist legislation, including the provisions which relate to exclusion orders.

In the past 25 years, terrorism has exacted a terrible toll. Many people have lost their lives. More than 3,000 people have died in Northern Ireland alone. Businesses have been destroyed. Substantial damage has been wrought on our towns and cities. The very infrastructure of our nation has been attacked. That is not just the result of Irish terrorism. International terrorists too have cost us dear.

In the past 20 years, there have been more than 80 international terrorist incidents in this country. No one here today will forget the shooting of Woman Police Constable Fletcher outside the Libyan People's Bureau in St James's square, London in 1984, or the attack in 1988 on the Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, when 270 people were killed by the blast. More recently, there have been the attacks on the Israeli embassy, and Balfour house in 1994. Only last January, letter bombs were sent to the London offices of an Arabic language newspaper, which seriously injured two security guards.

In combating this threat, we owe an enormous debt to the vigilance of the police and the security forces. I am sure that the House joins me in paying tribute to their work. They have had many successes in capturing and prosecuting terrorist suspects. The convictions of six IRA terrorists at the Old Bailey last July are but the latest in a long line.

In Northern Ireland, there has of course been a very welcome change for the better. The IRA and a number of loyalist groups have declared ceasefires. Currently those are holding. Substantive talks between the parties have begun. There is real cause for optimism that a lasting peace may be achieved in Northern Ireland. A negotiated political settlement is—as we are all agreed—the only way forward.

However, the ceasefire in Northern Ireland and the possibility of achieving lasting peace does not mean that we no longer need special legislation to investigate, to disrupt, and to counter terrorism. There are extremists on both sides of the divide in Northern Ireland who are opposed to the present ceasefires and who want the talks process to fail, as this morning's explosion in Londonderry shows.

On the international front, there is ample evidence of the activities of terrorists, whether sponsored by unfriendly Governments or acting in more or less organised groups. Some of these international terrorists may commit acts of terrorism within the United Kingdom or raise funds here, and others might use the United Kingdom as a base from which to launch attacks elsewhere in the world. In the face of such threats, we cannot—and we will not—drop our guard. Terrorists change their tactics all the time. Therefore, we must remain vigilant at all times and ensure that the police and the security forces have the powers which they need.

The current legislative framework for combating terrorism in the United Kingdom is contained principally in the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996. Both Acts represent the latest versions of emergency legislation first introduced in the early 1970s in response to the very serious attacks which had taken place within the United Kingdom.

This legislation has been regarded by successive Governments as exceptional but temporary, to be removed as soon as circumstances would allow; but 25 years of attacks and the continuing threat from terrorists make a mockery of the suggestion that legislation to combat terrorism can, or should any longer be, regarded as only temporary.

What is needed is permanent legislation to deal with the continuing threat from terrorism and the terrorist. I shall say more about that in a moment, but first I shall explain the Government's intentions, in advance of new legislation, in relation to the exclusion powers of the 1989 Act. As the House well knows, the exclusion powers in the prevention of terrorism Act enable the Secretary of State to exclude from the whole of the UK, or a part thereof, anyone who he is satisfied is or has been concerned in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism in connection with the affairs of Northern Ireland.

Unlike the powers to exclude under immigration legislation, the powers apply equally to British citizens as well as to the nationals of other states. In recognition of this, the powers have been used sparingly in recent years. Let me give the House the figures. In 1982, there were 248 orders in force. By 1994—just before the last ceasefire—the number had dropped to 74. During that ceasefire, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland revoked all the remaining 10 orders which he had made.

No order was made in 1996 or 1997 by my predecessor as Home Secretary against anyone who had not been previously excluded. This was despite the fact that the ceasefire had ended. When I took office on 2 May, the number had fallen to 22. For some years now, therefore, the power has been withering on the vine. During the last six months, I have considered 12 cases, as the law has required me to do. Of these, I have renewed two orders and either revoked or allowed to lapse the other 10.

As the House knows, the Government have long been opposed to these powers on the grounds that they were of limited utility and amounted to a form of internal exile without trial. This view is widely shared in this House and outside.

In 1987, Viscount Colville conducted a thorough review of anti-terrorist legislation on behalf of the previous Administration. In his report, Viscount Colville described the exclusion powers as "draconian", and recommended that they be removed from the statute book. He made that recommendation despite the fact that there was a continuing and active terrorist threat and that no ceasefire was in prospect. The exclusion powers have not only exposed the UK to severe criticism from our friends but have provided an easy argument for the apologists for terrorism to use against us.

Taking into account the view of those who advise me on security matters, I can therefore tell the House that—assuming the situation does not change—I am minded to allow the powers to lapse when the Act comes up for renewal next year. In the light of the recent developments in Northern Ireland, I have come to the conclusion that, at present, the exercise of these powers is no longer expedient to prevent acts of terrorism in relation to each of the 12 outstanding orders. I have therefore today revoked the last 12 orders.

In taking a fresh look at the whole of the legislation to see how it can be improved and strengthened, much of the groundwork has been done for us by the inquiry team led by Lord Lloyd of Berwick. The House will recall that he was asked in December 1995 to consider whether there would be a need for specific counter-terrorism legislation in the United Kingdom in the event of a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. His report was published in October last year. He concluded that there would be a continuing need for permanent United Kingdom-wide legislation.

Lord Lloyd made a number of detailed recommendations for changes to the definition of terrorism, to the powers to proscribe terrorist organisations and to the powers of the police to investigate and arrest those suspected of terrorism. His report was, of course, predicated on there being a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. That desirable state of affairs has yet to be achieved; but that does not mean that we cannot consider his recommendations and, if appropriate, implement them in the interim.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I therefore intend to present proposals to replace both the current Acts with permanent United Kingdom-wide counter-terrorism legislation. We intend to publish the proposals in the form of a consultation paper early in the new year. That paper will draw on Lord Lloyd's most helpful analysis and recommendations. Indeed, I hope that he will contribute further to our thinking.

In the interim, the police and the security forces must have the powers they need to combat terrorism. I therefore intend to seek the agreement of the House in March next year to the renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989. Similarly, the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1973 expires in August next year, so my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will introduce a Bill to extend its life and to make some amendments to it. The introduction of that Bill will follow later today.

Terrorism is not now a temporary phenomenon anywhere in the world. We need a robust and clear set of powers to enable the police, the security forces and the courts to deal effectively with all forms of terrorism for the foreseeable future, with the flexibility to respond to emergencies should they arise.

Like Lord Lloyd, the Government envisage that some existing powers will be confirmed and placed on a permanent footing; that some will be strengthened; and that others will substantially be changed. For example, it has long been our view that there should be a judicial element in the extension of detention process.

Our overall aim will be a framework of laws that are both effective and proportionate to the threat, against the background that the Government will never drop their guard in the fight against terrorism. I commend the proposals to the House.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): I start by thanking the Home Secretary for his courtesy in giving me an early sight of his statement. I join him in praising the bravery, courage and fortitude of our police, emergency services and security forces in the face of terrorist attack. I know that he will understand if, as a former Northern Ireland Minister who had the privilege for some time of being responsible for the security forces in Northern Ireland, I pay especial tribute to them for the work that they do; in particular, I single out the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

I also join the Home Secretary in expressing appreciation for the behaviour and character of the British people, in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland, who have controlled their temper in the face of vicious attack and provocation, and have refused to be swayed from the rule of law by the men of terror.

I assure the Home Secretary that we stand with him in resolutely rejecting international terrorism. I hope that he will agree that those on both Front Benches share a determination not to allow the United Kingdom to be used as a haven or a base for international terrorists. Does the Home Secretary also accept that we agree with Lord Lloyd on the need for on-going legislation, and that we look forward to the consultation paper?

The Home Secretary said that he had long opposed exclusion orders. Whatever his personal views may be, his party voted against the annual renewal of the PTA from 1983 to 1995—not acts that inspired much confidence in the Labour party. It abstained for the past two years because it sniffed an election coming. Does he accept that, while that ambivalence makes his commitment to permanent legislation the more welcome, it also means that, when his proposals emerge, they will need to be examined more carefully than usual because of Labour's record?

I have four further questions. The Home Secretary reminds us that he is required by law to examine each exclusion order. Given that 12 were revoked today, what political considerations did he take into account in deciding that they should suddenly be revoked?

Secondly, I hope that the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will not misunderstand me if I say that proposals such as those just outlined to the House, introduced perfectly legitimately by Government as a review of existing legislation but while the peace process is continuing, are bound to raise—at least in the minds of some—the possibility of linkage between the two events, especially as the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has been associated with the Home Secretary's statement. In coming to this decision today, has he or the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland received representations from members or officials of any other Government or from Sinn Fein that in any way influenced the Government's judgment in today's statement?

Thirdly, can the Home Secretary reassure the House that the decision to drop exclusion orders fully took into account any advice that he may have received from his security advisers?

Fourthly, I note that a consultation paper will appear early in the new year, and we look forward to reading and examining it, and to responding to it. Does the Home Secretary recognise that the new permanent legislation to which he referred should not be determined until the outcome of the Northern Ireland talks process is known?

The Home Secretary understands that we are fully supportive of the talks process, and I know that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland realises that, too, but the Home Secretary himself pointed out that the

[Sir Brian Mawhinney]

outcome of the talks is uncertain. Will he assure the House that no change to permanent legislation will be made until the outcome of the talks is known, so that the outcome of the talks can influence the judgments that go to make up the final proposals? Finally, does the Home Secretary accept that, in the meantime, we welcome his determination to keep so-called emergency legislation in place?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks. I should like to place on record on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and myself a reinforcement of his expression of gratitude, particularly to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, whose bravery and courage in dealing over 25 years with an appalling terrorist threat has no equal anywhere in the world.

The right hon. Gentleman tried to rework old debates about our attitude to the prevention of terrorism Act. I have only to remind him that it was my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister who said:

> "It is not in dispute, and never has been, that we need anti-terrorist legislation."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1994; Vol. 239, c. 300.]

That was never the issue between our parties when those matters were debated.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me four questions. I want to give him precise answers to each one. He asked whether I took any political factors into account when, as I was required to do, I examined the merits of each of the outstanding 12 orders that I have decided today to allow to lapse. The answer to that is no.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether we had received any representations from any other Government or from Sinn Fein asking us to make a statement such as this. The answer on behalf of both my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and myself is no.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether the decision on dropping exclusion orders took account of the views of those who advise me on security matters. The answer to that is yes.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me, lastly, whether I would undertake not to introduce any permanent legislation in the House before there was a clear outcome to the talks process which is currently taking place in the north of Ireland. The answer to that is also no, and I want to explain the reason for that.

In his second question, the right hon. Gentleman sought to know whether there was any direct linkage between what I have announced today and the talks process. I gave him a categorical undertaking that there was not. What we seek, and what I believe, by their actions, the previous Government sought to do, is to establish a base of permanent anti-terrorist legislation which is sufficiently robust and strong to cope with both periods of relative peace in terms of the internal threat and emergencies such as the failure of the ceasefire, and to deal with the continuing international terrorist threat.

I give the right hon. Gentleman an undertaking that there will be sufficient time after the publication of our consultative document to take full account of the views expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): As the Home Secretary knows, Ulster Unionist Members have long been in favour of a single permanent United Kingdom-wide anti-terrorism law. Is not the reality that, under the fine words of the Home Secretary, the substance is a significant relaxation of the stance of the Government with regard now to exclusion orders and also to internment, and the changes foreshadowed on arrest and detention powers? Does not considerable naivety underlie that?

As both Secretaries of State must realise, as terrorists in Northern Ireland realise that their desire to set aside the consent principle will not be satisfied, we shall see a return to violence in Northern Ireland. Indeed, we have seen violence today in Londonderry. Can the Secretary of State give us any further information on the bomb in Londonderry? I believe that Semtex was used in the bomb, which is available only to the Provisional IRA. That may be a significant development.

The Home Secretary referred to Lord Lloyd's report. He knows that, in that report, Lord Lloyd recommended change in the law on the admissibility of wire-tap evidence, something that the Royal Ulster Constabulary has sought for a long time. I know that there are arguments and foolish attitudes on the matter in some quarters, but could we not at least ensure that the law is changed in Northern Ireland, as the previous Government undertook to do, in advance of permanent legislation?

Could we also see something happen with regard to witness protection schemes? Far too often in Northern Ireland we have seen cases collapse because witnesses would not come forward. The Home Secretary paid tribute to the RUC. RUC men have been murdered and their killers not brought to justice for precisely that reason. That is something on which measures need to be taken.

Exclusion orders were a lazy and not particularly effective form of control. We need more effective forms. Can we really have that without the practices that are common elsewhere in the European Union with regard to identity cards and checks on movements of persons?

Mr. Straw: Let me deal with each of the hon. Gentleman's points in turn. He accused us of relaxing our views on anti-terrorist legislation. No one listening to my statement could objectively take that view. He confirmed his long-held opinion of exclusion orders. In reaching this decision, I took into account the view which, for example, he expressed in the House on 9 March 1994, when he said:

> "We consider exclusion orders to be objectionable in principle."

He went on to make the point in respect of non-British citizens, which is an important point, that action to exclude non-British citizens

> "is possible under immigration law."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1994; Vol. 239, c. 314.]

That remains the case. Later this afternoon, a Bill will come before the House to provide a proper process to give effect to such orders to exclude.

The hon. Gentleman asked about Lord Lloyd's proposals in respect of section 9 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985. That is a complicated issue. Lord Lloyd sought to distinguish between interception evidence that arose in respect of a national security investigation—which he said should be adducible in evidence—and other interception evidence, from a customs, police or Security Service intercept, in respect of the investigation of a serious crime, which he said should not be adducible in court.

That is one of the most complex of Lord Lloyd's recommendations. Many take the view that it is very difficult to draw the distinction in practice. There is much to be said on both sides of the argument about whether intercept evidence should be adducible in court; I continue to consider the matter carefully, and will be happy to take advice from hon. Members, particularly those who have had experience of the matter.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the composition of the explosives used in the bomb in Londonderry. I am afraid that I have no firm information, but as soon as we have information I shall ensure that he is informed. He also asked about the need for witness protection. The protection of witnesses in connection with anti-terrorist measures is a general but acute problem, and we are giving it careful consideration.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is the Home Secretary aware that we join in the tribute to those who, day in, day out, risk their lives and use their skills to protect the whole community against terrorists? Is he aware that we welcome the decision to get rid of exclusion orders, which we have wanted for some time and which has twice been recommended? Will he include in his review the Prevention of Terrorism (Additional Powers) Act 1996—which was rushed through the House in about a day and a half, with his support—so that we can engage in more measured consideration of its provisions?

Is it not clear, as the Home Secretary says, that, even if a peace settlement is secured in Northern Ireland, there will remain a need for anti-terrorism legislation because of the existence of threats from many different quarters? Such legislation must therefore contain sufficient safeguards to be capable of being placed permanently on the statute book. Does the Home Secretary recognise that it must safeguard the life and limb of members of our communities, but must also not hand a victory to terrorists by taking away basic liberties to which we have grown accustomed, but about which they care not at all?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks.

The Prevention of Terrorism (Additional Powers) Act 1996 was indeed pushed through the House very quickly with the support of the official Opposition. I make no apologies for that: the powers were needed, and—despite the claims made by, I think, the Liberal Democrats that they would somehow lead to the end of civil liberties and civilisation as we know it—the simple truth is that they have been effective, and have been used proportionately. I am not aware of a single allegation of abuse of those powers.

Of course, as we are considering permanent legislation, we shall consider all the existing temporary legislation and whether it should have a place in the permanent legislation. That includes the additional powers Act.

The right hon. Gentleman is, of course, right to say that, in framing legislation, particularly permanent legislation, we must secure a balance between the importance—the imperative—of protecting the public and security forces, and the importance, which he mentioned, of not handing a victory to terrorists by stooping to their methods. That is what we aim to do in the consultative process, and in the legislation that will follow.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's approach. A proper and permanent law, framed in a way that respects both the rule of law and democracy and the fight against terrorism, is long overdue. What disturbed so many of us in the past were the exclusion orders, which were outside the rule of law and not only damaged the country's international reputation but were a permanent and continuing propaganda victory for the Provisional IRA.

Will my right hon. Friend not worry too much about sniping from Conservative Front Benchers? At the same time as lecturing us some years ago on the prevention of terrorism Act, they were engaged in secret talks with the Provisional IRA—although, of course, they denied that until forced to admit it. I think that a little less hypocrisy in general on the issue is welcome, as is the reassertion of British values, democracy and the rule of law. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Whose is that telephone that is switched on? I shall not call another hon. Member until it stops.

Mr. Straw: I am happy just to listen to questions, but I fancy that hon. Members might like answers as well.

I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks, and pay tribute to him for his unstinting work in the search for peace in Northern Ireland. He is right to chide some members, not all, of the previous Administration. I recall that the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) made much about our approach to exclusion orders. It happens that, during the ceasefire, he lifted 39 exclusion orders. When it had broken down and terrorist activity was resumed, he lifted more exclusion orders than I have lifted until today. The facts speak for themselves.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Will the Home Secretary always bear it in mind that measures which may build confidence within some parts of the community can also lessen it in others?

Mr. Straw: Yes, I can, and for that reason we have paid careful attention to the balance of the proposals, and shall do so all the way through this process.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Were all 12 of the exclusion orders that my right hon. Friend has today revoked signed against republicans? Does he not agree that, notwithstanding the need to be ever vigilant against the vicious activities of terrorists, internal exile and internment should have no place in a mature parliamentary democracy?

Mr. Straw: The answer to my hon. Friend's last point is yes. In reply to his first point, I can tell him that, of the 12 orders which were outstanding this morning, 10 were in respect of alleged IRA terrorists and two were in respect of alleged loyalist terrorists.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I generally welcome what the Home Secretary has said. In particular, I welcome the fact that he will ensure that the police and security forces will have the powers they need. Having served in Northern Ireland and seen the effects of internment, I am ambivalent about it. However, should

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the RUC wish to keep the reserve power of internment in its locker, will the Home Secretary take notice of what the RUC says and keep it?

Mr. Straw: I am afraid that I must say to the hon. Gentleman that we are not ambivalent about internment. We do not think that it has any role to play in combating terrorism and I understand that the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary supports our proposals to remove the powers of internment from the statute book.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): My right hon. Friend will be aware that not many people here today voted for the prevention of terrorism Act in 1975. I was one of them, and I continued to vote for the PTA until it became apparent that some elements of that temporary measure offended human rights. One of them was on exclusion orders. During my time as Opposition spokesman on Northern Ireland, I very much opposed the provision of those exclusion orders in the PTA.

My right hon. Friend is aware of the story that I told him about John Matthews, a young man who was arrested—

Madam Speaker: Excuse me. We have questions on statements, and I have not yet heard a question from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Stott: My right hon. Friend would be aware—would he not?—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am trying to protect the interests of the many hon. Members who are seeking to put questions. There are many such Members, particularly on the Government side, not all of whom will be called if we go on in this fashion.

Mr. Stott: I take your admonition, Madam Speaker.

A young man was let free from a magistrates court and then rearrested, and an exclusion order was placed on him. In opposition, my right hon. Friend promised me that, once in government, he would get rid of this. I thank him for his promise today.

Mr. Straw: I remember the detail of the case, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Putting this legislation on a permanent basis is obviously a good idea and the Home Secretary is to be complimented for it, but will he pause for a moment and think about this proposition? He seems to be saying that, because exclusion orders are not used very often, they need not be on the statute book. In answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), he said that he had taken account of the advice from the security forces and, a few moments ago, he said that the Chief Constable had positively advised against internment.

What was the advice on exclusion orders? I suspect that it was not that the security forces were calling for the removal of exclusion orders—it was just that they were saying effectively that they could live with their removal. Which was it?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks. I said in my statement and again in answer to the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) that I had taken full account of the advice on security matters. I am not going to go into detail on the advice, but, if I had been advised that it was unsafe to lift the exclusion orders, I would not have done so.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement. This legislation has been long due for an overhaul. Since my election to Parliament, I have voted against all anti-terrorist legislation. I share his and everyone's desire that terrorists should be caught, but the bottom line is that we should not hold terrorist suspects incommunicado for up to seven days and nights without access to the protections that suspects in other serious criminal cases enjoy. Will he give an assurance that, when the review is completed, the new legislation will protect the rights of suspects, so that some terrible mistakes will not be repeated?

Mr. Straw: I understand my hon. Friend's point. I made it clear in my statement that we have long believed that there should be a judicial element in decisions about extensions of detention. I have no doubt that the other circumstances in which people are detained will be the subject of considerable debate when we publish our consultation document.

I accept the need to ensure that there is a real balance between the rights of suspects and the imperative of the police and security forces, on infrequent but regulated occasions, to detain people in wider circumstances than arise under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. That is the issue. We will examine it in great detail, and we will be grateful to my hon. Friend for his views, too.

Ms Jennifer Jones (Wolverhampton, South-West): In the proposed legislation, will my right hon. Friend consider measures to confiscate the assets of terrorist organisations, to cut off their economic supply line for repeating their acts of terrorism?

Mr. Straw: Those points will be among the elements of the consultation document.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): As one of those who down the years has dealt with these matters, I warmly welcome the decision that my right hon. Friend has announced today. I remember, as he will, being labelled the terrorists' friend, which was and remains a gross calumny. I am pleased to be reprieved by his decision today.

When my right hon. Friend introduces his more general legislation, what criteria will he use to ensure a minimum distortion of our traditional civil liberties?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his opening remarks. What we need is permanent legislation that balances the need to protect the safety of the public and the security forces against the need to ensure that suspects who are detained under the powers have proper rights, proportionate to the accusations they face. Also, the powers must be graduated according to the terrorist threat that exists at any particular time.

We all have to acknowledge that there is now a continuous threat of terrorism, certainly international terrorism, and there may be a continuing threat of terrorism arising from the north of Ireland. Therefore, we need permanent powers that are flexible enough to deal with a situation in which the threat is relatively low, as well as emergencies where the threat becomes high.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I thank the Home Secretary for ending the exclusion orders. It is a long overdue and welcome development. Can my right hon. Friend say a little more to the House about the judicial element in detention orders, and explain why all those in detention should not have the same access to courts as anybody arrested in the normal course of events for any other alleged or suspected criminal act?

Mr. Straw: This House has accepted over 25 years that the provisions under which terrorist suspects can be detained should be wider than those under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 because of the nature of terrorist activity. Ultimately, whether that should continue will be a judgment for the House and for the other place. It is my view that there should be that distinction but that there should be safeguards for terrorist suspects when they are detained.

We have always taken the view that one way to protect terrorist suspects is by having a judicial element in the extension of detention decisions rather than it being a decision by the Secretary of State, which is the current position under the primary legislation and which cannot be changed until that legislation is altered. How that judicial element is exercised will be considered when we are drafting the consultative document, and we will welcome the views of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as I have said many times in the past, it does not really matter whether I am killed by a terrorist or a crook—I am still dead—that the person who kills me is still a criminal, and that therefore the rights and duties in respect of interrogation should be the same? Surely we must now recognise that terrorism is a crime, and should be treated and dealt with as a crime.

Mr. Straw: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but the simple truth is that most jurisdictions across the world, including the Republic of Ireland and many continental jurisdictions, draw a distinction between the powers needed to investigate serious but non-terrorist crimes and those needed to investigate terrorist crimes, because of the nature of the organisation behind terrorists.

We face some serious organised criminal gangs but on the whole they are not backed by states, which is the case in some forms of terrorism. That is the reality in much international terrorism and, in the past, has applied to IRA and Irish terrorism. We have to take account of that different reality in formulating the powers needed within the new anti-terrorist legislation.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Thank you. We shall now move to the business statement.

Business of the House

4.12 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week.

MONDAY 3 NOVEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

Remaining stages of the Education (Student Loans) Bill.

TUESDAY 4 NOVEMBER—Opposition Day [3rd allotted day].

Until about 7 pm, there will be a debate on the Government's proposals for student finance, followed by a debate entitled, "The Countryside under Seige". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

WEDNESDAY 5 NOVEMBER—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Second Reading of the Magistrates' Courts (Procedure) Bill *[Lords]*.

Second Reading of the Fossil Fuel Levy Bill *[Lords]*.

Motion on the Ministerial and Other Salaries Bill.

THURSDAY 6 NOVEMBER—Proceedings on the Supreme Court (Offices) Bill.

Second Reading of the Nuclear Explosions (Prohibition and Inspections) Bill *[Lords]*.

FRIDAY 7 NOVEMBER—Debate on innovation and the role of small firms on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The provisional business for the following week will be as follows.

MONDAY 10 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Greater London Authority (Referendum) Bill.

TUESDAY 11 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Bank of England Bill.

WEDNESDAY 12 NOVEMBER—Until 2 pm, there will be the usual debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Second Reading of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

THURSDAY 13 NOVEMBER—Debate on a motion to take note of the outstanding reports of the Public Accounts Committee to which a Government reply has been given. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

FRIDAY 14 NOVEMBER—Debate on policing of London on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

The House will wish to know that on Wednesday 5 November there will be a debate on the fifth framework programme for research and technological development in European Standing Committee B.

The House will also wish to know that it will be proposed that on Wednesday 12 November there will be a debate on landfill waste sites in European Standing Committee A.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[Mrs. Ann Taylor]

[Wednesday 5 November:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community documents: (a) 7310/97; (b) 10385/97, Fifth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (RTD). Relevant European Legislation Committee reports: (a) HC 155-ii (1997-98); (b) HC 155-iv (1997-98).

Wednesday 12 November:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community document: 6692/97, Landfill Waste Sites. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 155-iii (1997-98).

Thursday 13 November:

Debate on a motion to take note of the outstanding reports of the Public Accounts Committee. Relevant Reports:

Report No:	*Title*	*HC No.*	*Publication Date*
1	The Office of Gas Supply: The Regulation of Gas Tariffs (The Gas Cost Index)	37	14 November
2	Progress in Completing the New British Library	38	20 November
3	The Sale of the Mining Operations of the British Coal Corporation	60	21 November
4	The Construction of Quarry House	69	27 November
5	Highways Agency: The Bridge Programme	83	28 November
6	The Audit of European Community Transactions	84	4 December
7	The Hospital Information Support Systems Initiative	97	5 December
8	Information Technology Services Agency: Outsourcing The Service Delivery Operations	98	11 December
9	Resource Accounting and Proposals for a Resource-based System of Supply	167	15 January
10	Excess Vote NI DHSS		19 February
11	Excess Votes Classes I, IV, VII, XIII, XIV, XVII (7&13)	293	13 February
12	ODA: Turkish Universities Equipment Project	70	27 February
13	H M Treasury: The Second Sale of Shares in National Power and PowerGen	151	6 March
14	Department for Education & Employment: Financial Control of Payments made under the Training for Work and Youth Training Programmes in England	61	13 March
15	The Award of the First Three Passenger Rail Franchises	39	13 March
16	Office of Electricity Regulation, Office of Gas Supply: The Work of the Directors General of Telecommunications, Gas Supply, Water Services and Electricity Supply	89	19 March
17	Health of the Nation: A Progress Report	85	20 March
18	National Savings: Financial Reporting	214	25 March
19	Former Yorkshire Regional Health Authority	432	26 March
20	Payments to the National Lottery Distribution Fund	99	27 March
21	The Management of Space in Higher Education Institutions in Wales	159	2 April
22	British Rail Maintenance Limited: The Sale of Maintenance Depots	168	3 April
23	Ministry of Defence: The Financial Management of the Military Operation in the Former Yugoslavia	242	4 April
24	Department of Transport: Freight Facilities Grants in England	284	8 April
25	Plymouth Development Corporation: Regularity Propriety and Control of Expenditure	450	8 April
REPLIES			
	Treasury Minute on the First to Eighth Reports from the Committee of Public Accounts 1996–97	CM 3559	12 February 1997
	Treasury Minute on the Ninth Report from the Committee of Public Accounts 1996–97	CM 3577	12 March 1997
	Treasury Minute on the Twelfth to Twenty-Fifth Reports from the Committee of Public Accounts 1996-97	CM 3714	16 July 1997

Friday 14 November:

Debate on policing of London. The following document is relevant: Report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis 1996/97.]

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I thank the right hon. Lady for her statement. I hope that she fully recovers her voice soon. I thank her for giving us two weeks' business—it is a precedent that we hope she will follow regularly.

Will the right hon. Lady confirm that in the debate on student grants and loans on Tuesday, we shall have a full explanation of why students from Scotland and the Irish Republic at Scottish universities will pay nothing for the fourth year of their degree courses, whereas students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland will have to pay £1,000? Will she also confirm that the money that is garnered from students will, in fact, go straight to the Treasury?

Will the right hon. Lady arrange for a statement next week on Government information officers? Is she aware that there is widespread concern about the reasons that a number of them have given when they have resigned? The Government are in danger of tarnishing the civil service with their own image, as the gentleman from Millbank replaces the gentleman from Whitehall. Will she take on board the concern both inside and outside the House about that matter?

Will the right hon. Lady also arrange for a statement next week, preferably as part of her business statement, assuring the House that when we come to debate proportional representation for the European Parliament, all the stages of the Bill will be taken on the Floor of the House? Does she accept that there is concern in all quarters of the House about that change to our electoral system?

Finally, will the right hon. Lady give an idea of when she expects the report of the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons to be debated on the Floor of the House?

Mrs. Taylor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments on the two weeks' business that I have been able to announce. I shall endeavour to give as much notice of business as possible, although I am sure that he will appreciate that that will not be possible on all occasions. However, we shall try.

The debate on student loans will be as comprehensive as possible, in the half day that the Opposition are allowing for it. It was their choice to have a half-day rather than a full-day debate. It will be an opportunity for Ministers to answer questions on the Government's policy and to show that it is a far better approach to financing higher education than anything that the previous Government, now the Opposition, have suggested.

I do not think that a statement on Government information officers is necessary. I refer the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends to the evidence that Sir Robin Butler gave this week to a Select Committee. I do not think that the concerns about the matter are justified.

On the Bill to introduce proportional representation for elections to the European Parliament, we are not yet in a position to announce when Second Reading will be held. We shall discuss matters relating to the handling of the Bill in the usual way.

I hope that we shall find time to debate the Modernisation Committee report during the coming month and that that debate will not be too far away.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will my right hon. Friend find time in the next week to debate the appalling news that Rolls-Royce is up for sale to any foreign firm that wishes to take it over? Is she aware that many British jobs in my constituency are now at risk? As the name Rolls-Royce has always been synonymous with the best of British workmanship, we can regard the development only with fear and trembling.

Mrs. Taylor: I understand the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend, and I know that she will be worried from a constituency point of view about the long-term outcome for that company. Ultimately, however, it will be a commercial decision. The Government will welcome any outcome that secures the long-term future of Rolls-Royce as a manufacturer of good-quality British cars.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I thank the Leader of the House for her business statement and particularly for her courtesy in giving us greater notice of forthcoming business. She will have noticed that the Opposition have chosen to split Tuesday's debate into two halves. Does she believe that that is to enable the two halves of the Conservative party to have their say, or does she perhaps believe that Conservative Members will save up the debate on the troubles within their party until Thursday's debate on the Nuclear Explosions (Prohibition and Inspections) Bill?

As the Leader of the House said, Tuesday's debate on student funding will be relatively short. Will she therefore agree to hold a separate debate, in Government time, on the Government's plans to introduce resource accounting, particularly to give us an opportunity to discuss proposals to separate, in accounting terms, lending from spending? Is she aware that, if that were done, it would be possible to release significant sums to resolve immediately the higher education funding crisis, without breaching departmental spending control limits?

Does the Leader of the House acknowledge that we can reduce our need to build more roads, by making better use of existing ones? Will she arrange for a debate on Government plans to provide means to improve our use of existing roads, and particularly to discuss Government measures to address the appalling behaviour of inconsiderate motorists who hog the centre lanes of our motorways, thereby reducing the number of lanes from three to two?

Mrs. Taylor: Perhaps we are having two half-day debates next week because the Opposition do not have much to say about either of those issues and did not think that either one was worth debating for a full day.

There is not scope for a debate on the overall funding of higher education in the very near future, not least because the Government will have to find time for the Second Reading of Bills that are now ready to be considered. Higher education funding issues will, however, have to be examined—although, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree, there are no simple answers. Obviously, he was speaking from the heart, or from personal experience, when he spoke of roads. I therefore trust that he has been able to respond to the Government's consultation process and to feed in his ideas in that way.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On the question of the coal industry and the fact that there is the possibility—the danger—of another 10 pits being closed in the next 12 months or even sooner, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that, if it is right to hand over large sums to Richard Branson to run the railways industry, it should be possible to devise a system to enable coal miners to retain their jobs? If the Government find ways and means to subsidise the industry in whatever form—whether it is clean coal or some other technology—will they ensure that that money is used to take a stake in the industry? The last thing that the miners want is for the money to go into Richard Budge's pockets.

Mrs. Taylor: I know my hon. Friend's concern about the problems facing the coal industry, and other hon. Members share that concern—as was demonstrated in yesterday's debate on the Adjournment. I am sure that my hon. Friends who are Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry have listened to all the comments that have been made.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Following the Chancellor's initiation of the debate on the European single currency, may we please have an early debate on the framework for the on-going debate, which is going to last for several years? In particular, can we ensure that we highlight the possible or, indeed, likely benefits of the United Kingdom staying out of the European single currency—in the unlikely event of that succeeding—and

[Mr. Eric Forth]

that we tell the British people the full implications for our nationhood of this country ever joining a European single currency?

Mrs. Taylor: If and when the time comes when the Government and Parliament recommend to the people in a referendum membership of economic and monetary union, the debate will be very full indeed.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Is the Leader of the House aware of the latest craze that is gripping the nation's young people—the use of laser pens that can be bought for less than £20 and which can project a high-intensity beam of light up to 200 ft, or from one end of the Chamber to the other? Those pens are being used to dazzle footballers, temporarily blind bus drivers and generally cause mayhem. Will my right hon. Friend consult the Home Secretary with a view to an early statement on how the laser pens can be controlled?

Mrs. Taylor: The matter has been raised in my constituency because of incidents there, so I am aware of the concern being expressed. Those pens have on occasion been used as offensive weapons and can be classified as such if they are misused in that way.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): The Leader of the House kindly said that the afternoon of 12 November had been earmarked for a debate on the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. May I nevertheless ask her to reconsider and instead to find time for a full two-day debate next week on the treaty of Amsterdam because, as I am sure she is aware, that treaty continues the process whereby more decisions that affect the United Kingdom are taken outwith the United Kingdom, by institutions that we do not elect and cannot remove? As there can be no issue that exceeds in importance that of democratic control of our affairs, may I plead with the right hon. Lady to allow the House a proper and full debate on the matter next week?

Mrs. Taylor: There is not time for a debate next week, but I have announced a debate for the week after.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Following the unfortunate but, I understand, accurate leak of the uprating statement, which reveals the disappointing news that basic pensions will next year be increased not in line with earnings but in line with prices, does the Leader of the House think that we should have a debate on early-day motion 1?

[That this House celebrates with joy and hope the election of what will be a great reforming Labour Government; applauds its manifesto declaration that 'all pensioners should share fairly in the increasing prosperity of the nation'; asserts that this can be achieved for the present generation of pensioners only by restoring the link between basic pensions and average earning; urges an immediate start to the promised manifesto review of 'all aspects of the basic pension and its value, second pensions including SERPS and community care' and a renewal of the commitment to retain SERPS.]

The early-day motion reminds us that the manifesto on which my right hon. Friend and I fought the general election a few months ago said that we promised that

> "all pensioners should share fairly in the increasing prosperity of the nation".

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend knows that the Government are reviewing what should happen to pensions. I do not think that, in advance of the public consultation which, I think, ends tomorrow, it would be appropriate to make any further comment at this stage.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): With regard to the forthcoming debate on the European referendum Bill, which my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) mentioned, does the right hon. Lady agree that it is a major constitutional change that, for the first time, the electorate will not be able to vote for an individual but will be forced to vote for a party? Will she therefore give a cast-iron commitment that there will be a full and proper debate and that it will be taken entirely on the Floor of the House? Incidentally, can she reassure me that the Labour party will not allow the gentlemen from Millbank to decide which Members of the European Parliament should be placed high on the list, thereby excluding those brave Members of the European Parliament who are trying to speak up for democracy but are being silenced by their party?

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman asked about the European referendum Bill; I think that he may be anticipating other policies that are on his mind at the moment. I presume that he means the Bill to allow elections to the European Parliament to be by proportional representation. I have not yet announced when the Second Reading of that Bill will be, but his points can be made when that time comes.

Ms Christine Russell (City of Chester): My right hon. Friend joined many women from both sides of the House yesterday on the steps of Church house to raise awareness of breast cancer. As that devastating disease affects one woman in 12, will my right hon. Friend try to arrange a Government statement at the earliest opportunity on breast cancer—its prevention, care and cure?

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend is right to say that the issue is of concern to many women. The campaign to increase awareness, which has been active in recent days, has made a clear impression on them. The fact that one woman in 12 can be affected by breast cancer is devastating. All those who have helped to increase awareness of the risk and the opportunities for screening are providing a good service. My hon. Friend has highlighted that today and I am therefore not sure that we need a statement in the near future.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): When will the right hon. Lady find time for a debate on this country's relations with India and Pakistan? Does she agree that, in spite of the pressures of imperial history, the friendship between the British and those nations is wonderfully strong? Is it not right, therefore, that the Foreign Secretary should be held to account for his gratuitously condescending gaffe over Kashmir?

Mrs. Taylor: I absolutely reject the hon. Gentleman's comments. I represent many people whose origins are in India or Pakistan, and I have found no difficulties with the Foreign Secretary's comments.

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): I welcome the changes to the Order Paper. After 90 years, they are well overdue. The changes are simple and effective and I wonder why they took so long. Many aspects of the House need modernisation. Are there any further proposals on the voting system?

Mrs. Taylor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. We are not able to debate the report of the Modernisation Committee next week, but I hope that we shall be able to do so in the near future. We shall then be able to mention some of the other proposals that the Committee is considering and give a clearer picture of our future work. The report that we have issued is not the last word on changes to the House.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): In just over a month, Ministers will go to an international conference on climate change. In view of the importance of the issue for the future of the world and the abdication of leadership on it by the Americans last week, will the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate in Government time, so that the House can examine the British Government's position before Ministers go to the conference in Kyoto?

Mrs. Taylor: The Government already have a good record on giving significant priority to environmental issues. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will be going to the Kyoto conference, and we are making progress. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the Americans have not been as quick as this country to embrace the problems and find solutions, but there is evidence of progress. We have to look for any positive moves at the conference. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will do that. I do not think that there is scope for a debate in the near future.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): Will my right hon. Friend give time in the next fortnight for a debate on the Child Support Agency? Every Member of Parliament, including Ministers, receives important, tear-jerking representations from constituents. Because of the gross deterioration in the operation of the Child Support Agency, the House should be given the opportunity to debate the issue and make changes where necessary.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that next Wednesday, when we discuss the fossil fuel levy, we should be able to debate the coal mining industry? May we have a statement on that industry, because of the threat to many miners' jobs? Next Wednesday would be an opportune time for clarification on the future of the industry.

Mrs. Taylor: I shall bring my hon. Friend's remarks on the fossil fuel levy to the attention of the Ministers who are dealing with that debate.

My hon. Friend calls for a debate on the Child Support Agency. I share his worries about how that agency is operating, as do my right hon. Friends in the Government. My hon. Friend may recall that shortly before the House rose in the summer, there was a debate in Government time on the Child Support Agency, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security expressed her concerns about how the system was operating. I know that she found the debate useful, because hon. Members were able to give individual examples of the significant problems that constituents of all of us have with the CSA. My right hon. Friend was able to take on board the points made and she is now reviewing the CSA.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): The Leader of the House may be aware of the worrying and serious development in Northern Ireland, where Sinn Fein-IRA have now extended their opposition to lawful and legitimate Protestant parades to Remembrance day parades. That shows that they are against everything that reflects the British way of life. In view of that development, will the Leader of the House arrange an urgent debate next week to consider the matter?

Mrs. Taylor: I do not know whether the specific points that the hon. Gentleman mentioned are accurate, but I believe that hon. Members on both sides of the House view the Remembrance day parades and ceremonies with great respect. That should be the case, because people from all communities and all religions were affected by the events that we commemorate on Remembrance day.

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Will the Leader of the House find time for us to debate the figures issued today by the Department for Education and Employment, which show a dramatic increase in the number of permanent exclusions from our schools? About 12,500 pupils are now permanently excluded from schools, and the seriousness of the figure is shown by the fact that 1,600 of those pupils have been excluded from primary schools. Clearly, our schools and our teachers face a crisis. The House needs to address the problem, and to try to understand some of the reasons for it and some of the difficulties involved. Many of our young people are now being forced out of school for one reason or another, and we need to address the problem as soon as possible.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend is right to say that exclusions are a serious problem for the individual children concerned and their families, and for the whole education world. We are concerned that today's figures show a further rise in the number of children permanently excluded from school. It is important that the new guidance now available is looked at by schools and that we have intervention as early as possible, to minimise the number of children who are permanently excluded. It is important to keep children in education and for them to benefit from the education to which they are entitled for as long as possible. Exclusions have to happen on some occasions, but we should be working hard to minimise the number of exclusions and their impact.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I join others in welcoming the innovation of giving two weeks' notice of matters to be discussed.

I note that the European Communities (Amendment) Bill is to be given its Second Reading on 12 November. Can the Leader of the House help me, as I am a new member of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs? The

[Mr. David Heath]

Committee's first opportunity to take evidence from the Foreign Secretary on the implications of Amsterdam will be on 4 November. It will, therefore, be extremely difficult for the Committee to give adequate consideration to that and other evidence that it may wish to take, and to report back to the House before Second Reading. I should be grateful if the Leader of the House suggested any way in which that aim could be accomplished successfully.

I also have a question about the European parliamentary elections Bill. Can the Leader of the House tell us whether there will be an early introduction of a registration of political parties Bill, as one Bill cannot operate without the other?

Mrs. Taylor: On Amsterdam, I have had a letter from the Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. I received the letter only last night, but I am looking at the Committee's concerns, to see whether there is any way in which we can assist it in its wish to have deliberations. I do not, however, think that we can hold up the Second Reading debate on that basis.

The hon. Gentleman referred to European elections and the system of proportional representation. He is right to say that it requires the registration of political parties. The Government intend to introduce legislation on the issue, and discussions with other parties are going ahead at present.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): May I draw to my right hon. Friend's attention early-day motion 343, on the future relationship between the national health service and personal social services?

[*That this House believes that overwhelming evidence from all parts of the country demonstrates that patients, service users and carers are suffering as a consequence of the organisational divide which artificially separates health care and social care, and that weaknesses in the community care system and delayed discharges are prime examples of the impact of the current divide on vulnerable individuals, their families and the wider community; notes the Government's decision to set up health action zones and make an extra £300 million available for the NHS as important and welcome developments, but also notes that collaboration and co-operation between health, social services departments and other relevant agencies whilst essential, has too often failed to deliver high quality, seamless and cost effective services; and further believes that the future configuration of the structures established to commission and deliver services should be directed by the needs of patients, service users and carers for accessible and integrated support, that existing health and local authority structures should be replaced by integrated organisations responsible for both health care and social care, and that these organisations should be democratically accountable to their local communities either through direct elections, or management boards which include significant representations from local elected members.*]

Will my right hon. Friend find time for the House to debate an issue that affects all hon. Members? Community care is a wonderful idea, but we all know that there are problems with the way in which the health service and local government social services interact. This is not an attack on local government, but a way in which we can try to bring the two services together.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend raises an issue that concerns many people: the need for proper co-operation between health and social services. The Government are not planning to introduce community care authorities to replace the existing structures in health authorities and local authorities, but we are concerned to achieve better co-operation. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health in particular is looking to ensure that that operates in practice and that community care is not blocked by unnecessary regulation or by local authorities and health authorities not working together properly. It is a matter of concern, but I am afraid that I see no prospect of an early debate. I am sure that my right hon. Friends concerned will be willing to listen to any ideas that my hon. Friend may have.

Mr. John Cryer (Hornchurch): I should like to ask my right hon. Friend for two debates. First, may we have a debate on further education, as distinct from higher education? The further education sector is crushed under the weight of corruption, a lack of accountability and a shortage of funding. Secondly, let me reiterate the calls for a debate on the mining industry. There was a debate last night on the narrow issues of subsidies and coal imports, but there are much broader questions. The coal industry will probably face destruction within 10 years at the hands of Dick Budge and the Conservative Members who flogged it off a couple of years ago.

Mrs. Taylor: I cannot add to what I have already said in respect of requests for a debate on the coal industry. However, I shall of course bring all comments to the attention of the relevant Ministers. As for further education, the Government are well aware of the financial difficulties that face many further education colleges and the position that we inherited from the previous Government. Ministers are considering the future of further education as a matter of urgency and will be making announcements in the near future.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): May I take my right hon. Friend back to her reply to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) in respect of the Bill giving effect to the Amsterdam treaty? Does she understand that there is cross-party disappointment that it will not be possible for the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs to complete a report before the Second Reading of the Bill on 12 November? That is something that members of the Select Committee and the Government should avoid in future, bearing it in mind that in our general election manifestos we all signed up to enhancing Select Committees. In view of my right hon. Friend's disappointing reply, which means that we shall not have time to produce a report before the Second Reading of the Bill, will she at least give the House an undertaking that the Bill will not proceed in Committee until the Foreign Affairs Committee has been given reasonable time to produce a report?

Mrs. Taylor: I am not sure that it is impossible for the Foreign Affairs Committee to complete its report. Select Committees have worked hard to meet the deadlines that we all face on certain occasions. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is giving evidence next week. I understand that the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe is also giving evidence to the Select Committee on European Legislation in this House, and in another place. Therefore, while I am trying to be helpful to the Foreign Affairs Committee, I cannot give my hon. Friend the guarantees that he seeks.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the Leader of the House perhaps consider, not next week but within a short time—bearing it in mind that the Kyoto conference is approaching, Customs and Excise seems to be objecting to the reduction of VAT on insulation material and we hope to put in hand in the near future a large house building programme, which is desperately necessary to house the homeless—finding time for a debate on the building regulations? We need to debate how they stand, how they should be altered and, indeed, how they should be improved.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend has combined with some ingenuity a whole range of issues. In respect of his basic point, I am afraid that I cannot find room for a debate on the building regulations in the very near future.

Mr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): May I ask my right hon. Friend to give serious consideration to a debate on safety at sea, especially in relation to fishermen? My question is prompted by my serious concern over the refusal by the marine accidents investigation branch to sanction the lifting of the fishing vessel, the Sapphire, from the sea bed in the North sea. It is my view, as a member of a fishing family, that we owe it to the families of the men who were drowned when the vessel foundered, that the vessel should be retrieved, as the Antares was from the Firth of Clyde, and that if the bodies are inside the vessel, they should be given a Christian burial.

Mrs. Taylor: I understand my hon. Friend's concern about a serious matter that affects him and the families involved. I regret that I cannot find time for a debate in Government time. Perhaps my hon. Friend will consider applying for an Adjournment debate or even a Wednesday morning debate, as it is clear that he takes the issue seriously.

BILLS PRESENTED

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Secretary Cook, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Blunkett, Mrs. Secretary Beckett, Dr. John Cunningham, Mr. Secretary Robertson, Mrs. Ann Taylor and Mr. Doug Henderson, presented a Bill to make provision consequential on the Treaty signed at Amsterdam on 2nd October 1997 amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related Acts: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 71].

NORTHERN IRELAND (EMERGENCY PROVISIONS)

Secretary Marjorie Mowlam, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Robertson and Mr. Adam Ingram, presented a Bill to postpone the expiry and otherwise make amendments of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 72].

Standards and Privileges

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House—

(i) approves the Sixth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (HC 182);

(ii) accordingly suspends the honourable Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Robert N. Wareing) from the service of the House for one week, with suspension of his salary as a Member for that period; and

(iii) requires him to withdraw from the precincts of the House for that period.—*[Mrs. Ann Taylor.]*

4.46 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I begin by offering my apologies to the House for failing four years ago to register a shareholding in a company under the name Robert Wareing Ltd., a shelf company listed on the public register at my home address and, of course, registered at Companies House. I hope that the House will accept that there was never any intention of concealment on my part. I receive no financial benefit of any kind and the choice of name and registered address was indeed the only reason this oversight came into the public domain.

Let me take a few moments of the House's time to explain the background and circumstances which have led to today's motion. On 28 May last, an anonymous letter posted in south Lancashire was sent to the Government Chief Whip. He held that letter until Tuesday 17 June, before he showed it to me. He said that he would show it to Sir Gordon Downey and I had no objection to that. The Government Chief Whip then said, "I will see you this evening." He made no attempt to see me that evening, but I looked him up in the Division Lobby when I was voting on the Local Government Finance Bill. Among 400 other people I was able only to ask him, "What did Sir Gordon say?" He told me that there had been a breach of the rules and he then said, "I will see you tomorrow." On 18 June I heard nothing from the Government Chief Whip and indeed I have not seen him from the time that I spoke to him in the Lobby on 17 June until now.

On Wednesday 18 June, the parliamentary Labour party passed a new rule allowing for suspension. I understand that my name was not mentioned at that meeting, but that afternoon I bumped into my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy) as I was coming out of the lift having taken constituents into the Strangers Gallery. She told me that the Government Chief Whip was planning to move my suspension at the parliamentary committee meeting that afternoon. I was in such a state—a state of great shock. I sent a letter to the Chief Whip. I had no response to that letter nor to two other letters that I sent him.

I was then presented with a statement, which I felt obliged to sign. I understand now how confessions are forced on people. The statement was drafted not by an hon. Member but by Mr. David Hill, a party apparatchik. I signed it and was told to get myself off the premises as soon as possible. I was then in the presence of the Deputy Chief Whip.

I shall deal now with the matter of non-registration. I have never been asked by anybody why I ticked the "no" box on the registration form. The committee—not, the House should note, Sir Gordon Downey, who did not recommend any punishment—never asked me about the ticking of the "no" box. In fact, the committee never asked me anything because I was never called before it.

The reason why I ticked the "no" box—this is my first opportunity to explain—was that I believed that what I had was a retainer. That was maybe a misconception; perhaps I was wrong. I apologise for being wrong—but it was a misconception. I did not think that a retainer was within the definition of shareholding, and, of course, the company issued no shares. The retainer was paid back, with interest, from my own pocket. All the allegations in the anonymous letter were dismissed by Sir Gordon Downey and the Committee on Standards in Public Life—except the one of non-registration.

On 24 June, Sir Gordon Downey received a letter from the Government Chief Whip. That letter contained further allegations which were not in the original anonymous letter. They were new allegations of the Government Chief Whip that, in particular, I had avoided paying income tax. I would have thought that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury would know that companies do not pay income tax and that corporation tax is paid only when there are profits.

The worst allegation that the Government Chief Whip made was that I had a covert relationship with a company which was believed to be a front organisation for the Bosnian Serbs, whose leaders were wanted for war crimes by the international community. That was a disgraceful allegation. All the Government Chief Whip's allegations were dismissed by Sir Gordon, who said that I would not be too distressed by his findings. He was right, I was not.

The committee, though, without ever seeing me, went on to recommend my suspension for not ticking the "no" box. I have explained to the House why I did not. Subsequently, I asked twice to appear before the committee, but both requests were turned down. I have never been before the body that now seeks my punishment. No hon. Member should ever again be sent to the Chamber to serve penance without having had a hearing before his peers.

I feel that I must say that an attempt has been made to create a scandal out of an oversight. Allegations were invented and added to those in the anonymous letter, covered by privilege and given currency. I trust that that will never happen again.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Mr. Robert N. Wareing be suspended from the service of the House for one week, with suspension of his salary for that period; and that he do withdraw from the precincts for that period.

The hon. Member accordingly withdrew.

Special Immigration Appeals Commission Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

4.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Protecting and maintaining the security of our nation is the prime responsibility of the Government of the day. International terrorist organisations are a major security threat. It is therefore rightly a high priority for our police and Security Service to counter the activities of international terrorists and their supporters in the United Kingdom. However, at the same time, we must ensure that our procedures for dealing with such people meet acceptable standards of fairness.

The key point is that it is always comparatively straightforward and easy to accord decent civil rights treatment to decent, reasonable people. We all know that it is much more difficult to give the same treatment to those who behave in an uncivilised way. It is the mark of a law-abiding and civilised society which respects human rights that we acknowledge the need to do so and to accord everyone fair treatment under the law.

Those involved in terrorist activities are, wherever possible, dealt with by the criminal law. However, that is not always possible or practicable. Sometimes, they have not broken our criminal laws but, because they are associated with terrorism, we do not want them in our country.

In dealing with those involved in international terrorism and other activities that threaten the safety of our nation, the ability under the provisions of the Immigration Act 1971 to exclude or deport those foreign nationals who pose a significant threat is very important. The powers are used sparingly; all decisions must be taken personally by the Secretary of State. However, those powers make a contribution to protecting the United Kingdom from those who threaten our national security.

The arrangements that had been in place until very recently were the result of careful consideration by our predecessors in government, and are not the subject of party disagreement. It was agreed that final decisions in such cases should rest with the Home Secretary of the day and should not be subject to appeal in the normal appeals process. During the passage of the Immigration Bill in 1971, it was agreed that, where a person is liable to deportation on national security grounds, he should be entitled to have the case against him reviewed by a non-statutory panel, which would advise the Home Secretary before he reached a final decision. It was, however, accepted by all parties in the House that the final decision was a matter for the Home Secretary of the day.

Although the arrangements were the subject of some criticism from time to time, they remained in place for almost 25 years. They were, however, challenged before the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Chahal. Judgment in the case was delivered late last November.

It may be helpful to hon. Members to know that, in the six years before the Chahal judgment, the non-statutory panel considered only six cases that were non-Gulf war related. In the exceptional conditions of the Gulf war, 51 cases were considered. We have widened—albeit slightly—the categories of those able to appear, and envisage that about five cases a year would be the most that we would think likely, in the normal course of events, to come before the commission.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I am listening very closely, as we all are, because the subject is very important. My interest in the subject was aroused when a constituent of mine, Raghbir Singh, was put in prison without being charged, held for more than a year and released only as a result of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights. He was released within a week of that judgment. Had that judgment not been made, for all I know, Raghbir Singh, whether guilty or not—no charges whatever were made against him and he had lived lawfully in the United Kingdom for 12 years—might have remained in prison to this very day and beyond. Such cases must cause us much concern, as I shall obviously develop if I am called to speak in the debate.

Mr. O'Brien: I hear what my hon. Friend says. A number of matters were certainly affected by the outcome of the Chahal case. We are anxious throughout to protect the rights of every person who comes before the law and who is dealt with by the Home Secretary as well as to ensure that the security of the nation is protected. Striking that balance is what the Bill is all about. It may help the House if I give some information about the numbers of people affected and the types of cases. I shall outline the Chahal case, because it provides the basis for the Bill and is also a brief reminder of the background.

In 1990, Karamjit Singh Chahal, an Indian national with indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom, was made the subject of a deportation order on the grounds of national security and other reasons of a political nature, including the international fight against terrorism. The order reflected the then Home Secretary's view that there was evidence suggesting that Chahal was involved in terrorist activities connected with the Sikh separatist movement in his homeland. Mr. Chahal then claimed asylum, but his application was refused. The ground for the decision to deport him was national security and there was, at that time, no right of appeal to the immigration appellate authorities against the Home Secretary's decision. Nor was there any right of appeal against refusal of the asylum application.

The security case against Mr. Chahal was considered by the non-statutory advisory panel in accordance with the arrangements that I have already outlined. Having exhausted his domestic remedies, including judicial review, without success, Mr. Chahal applied to the European Court of Human Rights. In its judgment in Mr. Chahal's favour last November, the court found that the existing procedures for dealing with cases involving the deportation of foreign nationals on the grounds of national security—and, in particular, the arrangements for challenging decisions made by the Secretary of State in such cases—were in breach of the European convention on human rights. Specifically, it found that the procedures were deficient in respect of article 5(4) and article 13 of the convention. In brief, it found that there was no provision for the basis of any detention to be meaningfully considered by a court in national security cases and that there was no effective domestic remedy for a violation of rights under the convention.

[Mr. O'Brien]

The Government accepted the court's judgment and introduced the Bill in another place shortly after the election. Until the Bill is passed, our ability to deport a person on national security grounds is necessarily severely constrained. While the Bill is mainly required to respond to the Chahal judgment, it also gives us the opportunity to provide a right of appeal to the same commission to certain European Economic Area nationals and to those otherwise exercising rights under the treaty of Rome, in cases in which there is currently no right of appeal. Those are predominantly cases involving national security considerations.

The Bill is short and has a limited purpose. Those affected by it fall into narrow categories and I have already outlined to the House the numbers who, in normal circumstances, will be involved. The House will also bear it in mind that in the past—for example, during the Gulf war—more people became involved in such applications.

Clause 1 will establish a new body, which will be known as the special immigration appeals commission. As schedule 1 makes clear, appointments to the commission, like appointments to the immigration appellate authority, will be made by the Lord Chancellor. Members of the old advisory panel were, by contrast, appointed by the Home Secretary. When hearing an appeal, the commission will comprise three members. One will be a person who holds or has held a high judicial office—at least a High Court judge. The second must be a person who has experience of dealing with immigration appeals. As a result of an amendment made in the other place, it is now clear on the face of the Bill that that person must be either a legally qualified member of the immigration appeal tribunal or the chief adjudicator.

The qualifications of the third member are not specified in the Bill. However, it is intended that the person will have some experience of national security matters and will be familiar with the evidence that is likely to be presented to the commission. The Lord Chancellor takes the view that those arrangements will best represent a proper balance of knowledge and experience for the commission.

Clause 2 sets out the circumstances in which a person may appeal to the new commission. The Immigration Act 1971 and, more recently, the Immigration (European Economic Area) Order 1994 have previously denied any appeal in the cases described. For the most part, the cases in which there has been no right of appeal have been those in which a decision has been taken on the basis that it would be conducive to the public good on the grounds of national security.

Clause 3 provides that the new commission will be able to grant bail when a person is detained under the Immigration Act 1971 and the grounds of the detention are that it is in the interests of national security. Schedule 3 modifies the existing bail provisions in cases dealt with by the new commission.

Clause 4 represents the most important amendment made in another place. It was not clear in the original draft of the Bill whether the commission could make decisions that would be binding on the Home Secretary. As Lord Williams of Mostyn made clear on Second Reading in the other place, it had always been the intention that the decisions of the commission would be binding on the Home Secretary. Indeed, that was an essential element of complying with the judgment in Chahal. However, what is now clause 4 of the Bill puts the question beyond doubt.

The detailed procedures for the new commission are not set out in the Bill. However, clause 5 describes some of the main areas that will be covered by the procedure rules made by the Lord Chancellor. Those rules will, in view of their importance, be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure of the House. A first draft of the rules was made available by the Lord Chancellor during the passage of the Bill in another place and it is intended that an updated version, which takes account of comments made so far, will be made available to the House before the Bill reaches Committee.

Clause 5 recognises the difficulties raised by the sensitive cases with which the commission is being created to deal. It specifically requires the Lord Chancellor, when making rules, to have regard to two equally important factors—the need to ensure that decisions that are the subject of appeals are properly reviewed, and the need to ensure that sensitive information is not disclosed contrary to the public interest. That is why the draft rules not only make it clear that an appellant will have the right to be legally represented in proceedings before the commission, but provide for possible restrictions on the need for full disclosure of the reasons for decisions to be given to the appellant. They also allow proceedings to take place in the absence of the appellant and his or her legal representative.

The Government accept that those provisions fall short of the normal demands of natural justice under the law, but they have introduced the provisions having taken account of the views expressed by the European Court of Human Rights in its judgment in Chahal and in other cases involving national security considerations. The court has explicitly acknowledged that, when national security issues are at stake, consideration will almost inevitably have to be given to confidential material and that, when that is the case, safeguards—such as the ones included in the Bill—may be essential. In such cases, the court has said that what is needed is a remedy that is "as effective as can be", given the threat to national security.

One important safeguard for the appellant will be provided by clause 6, which was inserted during the Bill's progress in another place. It expands on an idea that was in the Bill on its introduction—that the Attorney-General, or his equivalent in Scotland or Northern Ireland, should be able to appoint a person to represent the interests of the appellant in those parts of the proceedings from which he or she is excluded. That builds on an approach adopted by the Canadians, which was commended by the European court in its findings in Chahal. That person, whom we shall call the special advocate for the purpose of debate, will be a qualified lawyer and will be expected to help the commission to examine the security evidence. In particular, he will look at the evidence as if he were doing so on behalf of the appellant. There will not be the lawyer-client relationship, where the special advocate is required to disclose all information to the client. There will be a measure of confidentiality, which we think is necessary in cases involving national security.

I should like to give notice to the House that the Government will be tabling an amendment to the Bill in Committee. The amendment, although minor, is important and responds to a point that arose following consultation with interested parties. It will provide for an appeal from the commission to the Court of Appeal on a point of law. That will mirror the existing arrangements for such a right of appeal in respect of decisions of the immigration appeal tribunal. We expect it to be a more satisfactory arrangement than leaving an appellant to seek judicial review on such a point, particularly as the commission will be chaired by a High Court judge. In addition, it may be a more efficient use of the commission's time. We are anxious to ensure that those matters of great importance do not drag on and that the procedures used can be dealt with expeditiously.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): It is helpful that the Minister has been able to point to the amendment that he is to table in Committee. Since the money resolution is to be dealt with today, can he tell us what the financial effects of that amendment will be?.

Mr. O'Brien: We have looked at the financial effects in broad terms and we shall provide further details in Committee. At this stage, it would be better if I waited until the Committee to give the hon. Gentleman the full view of the likely implications. However, given the number of cases likely to be dealt with—perhaps five a year, one or two of which may result in a referral to the Court of Appeal—the amounts involved are relatively small.

Despite its immigration context, I hope that the Bill will not prove to be highly controversial. It is necessary because of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Chahal. As the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) will accept, a Bill along the same lines would have been produced by the Conservative party had circumstances been different. It is clearly important—even with a widely accepted objective—that proper consideration is given to the detailed delivery of the objectives of the Bill. The special immigration appeals commission to be created by the Bill will deal with a small number of difficult cases. The right of appeal to the commission will ensure that the right to a proper process of those suspected of terrorist activity will be safeguarded, although within a framework that also safeguards national security.

The Bill aims to achieve the necessary balance between the need to ensure that decisions are properly reviewed and the need to ensure that information is not disclosed contrary to the public interest. Taken together, we believe that the measures will accommodate the legitimate concerns that we have about the nature and sources of intelligence information and accord the individual appellant a substantial degree of procedural justice. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.12 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): As the Minister has anticipated, the Bill has the support of the Opposition—as we indicated in another place. We would have introduced such a Bill were we still in government. We acknowledge the need to ensure full compliance with the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in the Chahal case last November, which the Minister has described.

This country has a proud record of honouring our international obligations and commitments, although we believe that it is essential for the effective operation of the European Court of Human Rights that due weight is given to the margin of appreciation—as it is called—for individual states. It is also important that this House has the opportunity to scrutinise proposed changes in the law to bring about that compliance. We believe that that opportunity should take the form of full parliamentary scrutiny and debate—the full rigours of the parliamentary process. We would be concerned by any curtailment of that process.

First and foremost, our concern when considering the Bill is with national security, especially in these circumstances where we are required, in effect, to balance the interests of national security with the rights of individual asylum seekers and appellants. We must bear it in mind that when the commission has been established, individuals will be able to appeal to it against decisions of the Home Secretary of the day. Those decisions will have been taken by the Home Secretary on the grounds of national security. The appeal will then go to the commission, and it will be for the commission to make a final and binding decision. That decision will bind the Home Secretary of the day through a direction in the legislation. We are concerned that commission decisions will be binding in these important cases where national security is at risk.

I welcome what the Minister has said today about a right of appeal to the Court of Appeal for the Home Secretary alone against decisions of the commission. We mooted this when the matter was deliberated in another place and I am pleased that the Minister is minded to grant such a right.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood me. I am happy to listen to any points that he may make about the Bill, but the amendment that we shall be tabling deals with putting before the Court of Appeal matters of law, not with facts or the position with regard to clause 4 of the Bill. I got the impression that the hon. Gentleman thought that we were saying something else.

Mr. Clappison: The Minister has once again anticipated me. To continue to push at what appears to be an open door, I was going to invite him to consider widening the grounds of appeal to include discretion as well as points of law, because these are cases where the commission will be exercising its discretion under clause 4, as the Minister rightly said. We shall be concerned about cases involving points of law and those involving the exercise of discretion where there might be a feeling on the part of the Home Secretary of the day that the commission has got it wrong. I accept what the Minister has said—that these cases may be few and far between and that the number of cases that the commission deals with will be small. It follows that the number requiring the Home Secretary to consider an appeal against the decision of the commission will be small as well.

I do bear it in mind that the commission will be composed of eminent and experienced people. We make no criticism of its composition, but even eminent and experienced tribunals can sometimes get it wrong—if I can put it that way—in difficult and controversial cases in which others may make a different judgment. We stress the interests of national security in these matters. The Home Secretary of the day will have originally taken a decision on grounds of national security. We think it

[Mr. Clappison]

should be open to the Home Secretary to seek a review of a commission decision which overturns the judgment of the Home Secretary. We will return to this matter in Committee.

While on the subject of possible conflict between the Home Secretary's judgments and those of the commission, I wish to take issue with the Minister on another point. I do not take great issue with the procedural rules as a whole, and I accept that they strike a fair balance in draft form between the rights of the individual and the interests of the state—especially the need for some of the evidence not to be disclosed, and I support the Minister's remarks on that. The role of the special counsel clearly will be important in this context. Under the procedure for dealing with the evidence—under rule 5, I believe—it will be for the chairman of the commission, assisted by the special advocate, to decide what evidence should be disclosed to the appellant.

The question arises: what if the Home Secretary of the day disagrees with the decision and is still concerned that sensitive information might be disclosed? The Minister should consider whether he is completely satisfied that the matter should rest with the final decision of the commission or whether it is possible to consider some way in which the Home Secretary could make further representations to the commission. In such important and sensitive matters, one cannot spend too much time on reflection.

I do not want to undermine the balance that has been created. It is in the interests of justice, in so far as it is possible, and consistent with the needs of national security, for the appellant to know the case against him and on what evidence it is based. It is also right for the appellant to have a summary of the evidence taken in his absence and to be able to comment on it.

I listened to the Minister's outline of [illegible] commission's jurisdiction under the Bill. Do the Government have any plans to extend the commission's remit beyond that which the Bill will give it? They were asked that in another place and the reply was not as fully considered as it might have been, so perhaps the Government could give us further clarification today.

How will the commission handle asylum cases involving article 3 of the human rights convention which, as the Minister and the House will know, concerns torture and inhumane treatment? Do the Government take the view, as they appeared to do in another place, that when there is a finding that the appellant is at risk under article 3, national security considerations should not come into play and there should be no balancing exercise between individual rights and national security?

I believe that the Bill's financial effects, to which the Minister referred, have escalated a little—to put it mildly—since it began its progress in another place. There the Government suggested that the annual cost of legal representation would be £1,000. That figure provoked some surprise—and requests for information about where such cheap legal representation could be found. The new figure is £20,000; perhaps the Minister could say a little more about how the calculations have been made and why the costs appear to have escalated.

We believe that the Bill deserves debate and scrutiny on several counts. It involves national security and the rights of individuals, and a balance must be struck; in doing so, we should not lose sight of the fact that some of the people concerned are extremely dangerous, not only to their countries of origin but to the people of this country and to nationals of their country of origin living in this country. Important matters of national security are at stake and it is necessary to take some care in striking the right balance.

5.23 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): My interest arises because one of my constituents, Mr. Raghbir Singh, who had lived lawfully in the United Kingdom for 12 years, was detained and put in prison with no charges made against him; he was married to a British citizen, but had he been a United Kingdom national himself, he could not have been treated in that way.

Mr. Singh was detained as a threat to national security. He strenuously denied involvement in terrorism of any kind, but there was no way that that could be tested, as would normally be the case, in a court of law. I was, and remain, in no position to say whether he was telling the truth. How on earth could I, as his Member of Parliament, know? There was no question about his active political concern with events in India and he has frankly admitted, as the editor of a Sikh newspaper, that he wants a separate Sikh state there; but he insists that he never wanted to use terrorism to achieve that.

It is interesting to note the way in which the Sikh community at large took up Mr. Raghbir Singh's case. For all I know there may be some exceptions, but I believe that the large majority of Sikhs in this country who are actively involved in such matters have no desire to see the use of terrorism. Together with the National Union of Journalists, of which Mr. Raghbir Singh was a member, the Sikh community made its views known to many Members of Parliament of all parties, and Amnesty took up the case and made him a prisoner of conscience, which is rather unusual in the United Kingdom.

The previous Home Secretary challenged me about it, but I have never denied that the Home Secretary of the day should have powers to deal with national security, regardless of what happened to my constituent. Terrorism, as I and other hon. Members have said time and again, is one of the great curses of the modern world. The notorious suicide bombers in the middle east take the lives of men, women and children, and even babes in arms; there is no mercy when the terrorist killers strike.

Thousands of civilians have been murdered by terrorists in Algeria and Sri Lanka, not to mention the atrocities committed by the IRA and the loyalist gunmen. Only today in *The Guardian*, there is a story of a former head teacher who was one of the victims of the Enniskillen bombing and has been in a coma for 10 years. He had heart bypass surgery about three years before the bombing, and when he went on the Remembrance day parade 10 years ago he was not murdered, but he has now lain in a coma all this time under the tender care of his wife. That is an illustration of what terrorism means in human terms. We must never forget that for one moment.

How, in a democratic society, are we to deal with those who are considered a threat to national security, when no charges are made against them? That is entirely different from the matters involving IRA terrorism to which I have just referred. In the case of Chahal, the European Court of Human Rights, by a majority decision, found that by detaining Mr. Chahal for six years—my constituent was in prison for a little over a year, and that was bad enough—the United Kingdom was in violation of four articles of the human rights convention.

As the Minister said, article 13 is especially important. It says:

> "Everyone whose rights and freedoms as set forth in this Convention are violated shall have an effective remedy before a national authority notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity."

The court also found that article 5(4), which is an important safeguard in a democratic community, had been violated. Article 5(4) states:

> "Everyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take proceedings by which the lawfulness of his detention shall be decided speedily by a court and his release ordered if a detention is not lawful."

The European Court of Human Rights believed that that safeguard had not been observed in the case of Chahal. As I said in my intervention, if the decision had not been taken, I would be speculating not only on how much longer Mr. Chahal would have remained in prison but on how long my constituent would remain in detention. It was more than a year before he was released as a result of the judgment. These are worrying matters.

If my constituent was involved in terrorism, he deserved anything that happened to him. The Home Secretary told a deputation of Members that it was not alleged that my constituent was involved with terrorism in the United Kingdom, but I accept that if he was using the United Kingdom as a base for terrorism against a friendly country, national security considerations are involved. If we say that we are against terrorism, we mean that we are against it—it is not just empty rhetoric.

Like all occupants who hold the office, the Home Secretary was acting on advice. If that advice was wrong, not necessarily maliciously, and Raghbir Singh was, as he has always claimed, innocent, imagine what it meant to be taken away. It so happened that it was at 6 am when the knock on the door came and he was put in prison, his family left behind, and no charges made. In such cases, the person would be left in prison until the asylum application was decided and the case on security grounds would have been dealt with under the previous panel arrangement. I ask hon. Members to bear it in mind how serious such matters are when they concern people who are not involved in the terrorism that has been alleged against them.

The only remedy available, apart of course from the European Court of Human Rights, was the review of the Home Secretary's decision by a non-statutory panel. Its decision was in no way binding on the Home Secretary. I am glad that the Bill clearly sets out that the decision of the special commission will be binding on the Home Secretary, although I note the proposed amendment mentioned by the Minister, which I shall study carefully when it comes before us in Committee because it has certain aspects about which I am not altogether happy.

The special immigration appeals commission is undoubtedly an improvement on the previous procedure. It will be more like a court, although clearly very different from an ordinary court, for reasons that we understand. I am pleased that there will be a bail jurisdiction. That is certainly an improvement, but I have several questions.

Will the appellant be informed of all the allegations against him? Clause 6 states:

> "The relevant law officer may appoint a person to represent the interests of an appellant in any proceedings"

before the proposed commission. I listened carefully to what the Minister said. In the main, I hope that people with allegations against them will be able to have their own legal representatives; that is important. If that will not be the case in certain circumstances, what arrangements will be made for the person who is appointed by the relevant Law Officer, who will be the Attorney-General in England, to represent the appellant? Will a lawyer who is appointed not by the appellant or his solicitor but by the Attorney-General take instructions from the appellant? Will he largely act as if he were the lawyer appointed by the appellant? If he does act in such a way, what would be difference between an appellant having his own lawyer and the arrangement in the Bill? Perhaps the Minister will explain. If we are to have machinery in which such allegations are made, it is surely important that every legal redress is made available to appellants. One of the most important things in a country based on the rule of law is obviously that a person should have their own lawyer to argue the case.

What about the time between detention and the hearing? How long will it take for cases to come before the commission? It should be done as speedily as possible, although there must be time for appellants to get together the necessary evidence to refute the allegations, if they intend to do so.

If the commission dismisses an appeal, what will happen—it may be rare, but it could well occur—if further evidence comes to light? Will the case go back to the commission or will the Home Secretary have powers to decide that the new evidence is compelling and be able to reverse his original decision? I accept that if an appeal is dismissed, the situation is not likely to occur, but it may.

When the Bill becomes law, will it no longer be possible for such cases to be referred to the European Court of Human Rights? I hope not. I accept that the reason for this measure is so that it will no longer be necessary to take cases to the European Court of Human Rights. In effect, we are putting the judgment of Chahal into United Kingdom legislation. Does the Bill necessarily mean that the road to the European Court of Human Rights is barred? The Minister shakes his head, so I take that as his answer.

I have already explained why I am interested in the matter, and I am sure that my constituent will be interested in it. I would like to pay tribute to two people. First, a former Member of this House, Max Madden, took up the case of Chahal on many occasions. He retired from the House at the general election, but the manner in which he pursued the Chahal case—his persistence and diligence and the time that was involved—is a tribute to the way in which he carried out his duties as a Member of Parliament. I doubt whether many votes were involved, especially as he was not standing again for election—it was a point of principle, and all praise is due to him for carrying out his duties in such a way.

I would also like to mention David Burgess, of Winstanley Burgess solicitors, who pursued the Chahal case to the European Court of Human Rights. He also advised me about matters. I realise that in Government circles—I hope that this does not apply to the present

[Mr. David Winnick]

Government—he was probably looked upon as one of those difficult characters who pursue matters when they should not and who become over-interested in civil liberties. It is a good job that we have such people in Britain. The rule of law and the democratic process is strengthened by such solicitors. I hope that cases such as those of Chahal and Raghbir Singh will be dealt with in a way very different from when they were originally detained.

5.39 pm

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): I share the feelings of the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) when he condemns terrorism and I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House do as well.

The Bill is necessary and it will have the support of the whole House, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) has already said. Until last year, the advisory panel operating under rules that flow from the Immigration Act 1971 was able to review orders to deport or exclude foreign nationals considered a threat to national security, but the Home Secretary had the final say. The Bill makes the decisions of the new statutory commission binding on the Home Secretary, in order to satisfy the European Court of Human Rights.

Anyone who followed the chain of events in the case of Karamjit Singh Chahal, from the deportation order served on him, through refusal of his asylum application and the advisory panel's review, to his application to the European Court of Human Rights and the court's judgment a year ago, will regard the Bill as an inevitable consequence of those events.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere said, the Bill was already in preparation before the general election. Since the European Court of Human Rights found that our domestic courts were not in a position to treat with the national security aspects of cases involving terrorists and, at the same time, ruled that people facing deportation on security grounds must be allowed some means of challenging the Home Secretary's decision, a Bill giving statutory authority to new procedures was needed.

Without the Bill, it could be argued that the Government's ability to remove or bar a terrorist or other person who was a security risk might well be stymied simply by the individual's staving off the order by showing the Government's failure to meet their obligations under the convention. That conjures up an appalling prospect of known foreign terrorists at work in Britain being able to prolong their activities here and to cock a snook at the police and the Security Service by using the ironic argument that we were not treating them—in this haven of freedoms known as the United Kingdom—with internationally recognised standards of fairness.

The Bill is short. It has already been given careful and expert consideration in another place so a great deal of further clarification may not be required on Second Reading. It is important, if only for the avoidance of future doubt, that the Bill satisfies the European Court of Human Rights' unequivocal commitment to article 3 of the convention on torture or inhumane, cruel and degrading treatment, and that has been achieved.

It also helps that the Bill now clarifies the binding nature of the commission's decisions on the Home Secretary, as the Minister pointed out. Any lingering ambiguity on that score which left the European Court of Human Rights in any doubt about the new commission's ability to fulfil the spirit and purpose of articles 5 and 13 of the convention might render the legislation ineffective. Equally, it was sensible to include in the Bill the requirement that a person to be removed or barred on grounds of national security must be given notice of the right to appeal. Again, the Minister has highlighted that.

No matter how offensive it may seem to some observers that Parliament appears to be bending over backwards to be fair to terrorists, our system of justice will be all the stronger for allowing such terrorists a swift but fair appeal, independent of the Home Secretary of the day, against the charge that they are a risk to our national security.

I hope that the Minister will be able to enlarge on two aspects of the Bill in his reply to the debate. The first is the use of a special advocate to be appointed by the Attorney-General to speak up for the appellant on security evidence at a stage in the proceedings when both the appellant and the appellant's counsel will have been excluded from the hearing. The Government say that there will be no client relationship between the appellant and the special advocate yet somehow the appellant, his lawyers and the watching world, not to say the European Court of Human Rights, will be asked to accept that the advocate is fearlessly fighting the corner of the terrorist, who is not his client in any case. It is all very British. I understand and fully accept the security constraints, but I want to believe that it will work.

Can the Minister assure me that nothing in those arrangements will allow doubt to be cast on the proceedings in a way that could discredit the new commission in the eyes of the European Court of Human Rights, without the approval of which we shall be back to square one in the removal of terrorists?

My second concern is about the right under article 8 of the convention of a person refused entry clearance on the ground that leave to enter would not be conducive to the public good to appeal to the commission. The need to show exemplary fairness to a terrorist who would be a risk to public safety if he was given leave to enter, but who says that he wants to be reunited with his family in this country, will seem rather far fetched even to the most fair-minded of people. However, if that is what is needed on the statute book to prevent the European Court of Human Rights from overruling the Home Secretary's exclusion orders, I accept that it is sensible to include it in the Bill.

My concern is that the provision will set a hare running over article 8 of the convention in other broader and less controversial areas of immigration control. Let us take the example of a person who is not even remotely a security risk and is therefore not subject to the Bill, but who has for whatever other reason been refused entry clearance, say over an application for a visit visa to see part of his family resident in the United Kingdom. If the entry clearance officer has done a conscientious job and, under the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, the scope exists for a swift internal review of the refusal by the senior entry clearance officer in post, to my thinking that individual rightly has no further right of appeal against that refusal.

Once the Bill is passed, the disappointed visitor, whose only vice seems to be that he would probably be tempted to overstay, will see that even known terrorists, who could quickly threaten the British public and be the cause of chaos and mayhem, have the statutory right to appeal against refusal of entry clearance. Every rejected visa applicant will shout, "Where's the justice in that?" Is not clause 2(2) likely to be the thin end of the wedge for British immigration control and the pressures that will be imposed by article 8 of the convention, especially when legislation is introduced in the House to incorporate the convention into British law? I hope that the Minister will be able to show me that my fears are unfounded and that this is not the thin end of the wedge.

There was some mirth in another place about the limited financial provisions of the Bill, which have been changed to some extent. I do not intend to challenge the money resolution, but it is clear how painfully aware the Home Office has become of the costs of immigration control, as I repeatedly predicted would be the case when I was a Minister there and at every opportunity that I have had since then to do so. I hope that it will be in order to say to the Minister that the best way to limit expenditure in the long term and to reinforce immigration controls is to spend an admittedly large sum now—I said this to the previous Government—on processing the backlog of asylum applications as swiftly as possible. That will not only assist the genuine refugees languishing in the queue but, by getting rid of the queue, will destroy the very thing that attracts the bogus applicant—the ability to join the queue and wait here perfectly legally with the benefit of social security for up to four years before his case is heard. If the Minister can persuade the Treasury to spend a lot of money now to save vastly more every year once the queue has gone, he will achieve fundamentally important progress in immigration control, to the benefit of the whole country.

If the Minister also signals that he will consistently use the available fast-track mechanism for manifestly unfounded asylum applications such as those of the Czech and Slovak gipsies at Dover, who have travelled through another safe country where asylum could reasonably have been claimed before reaching the United Kingdom, he will have the force of the Geneva convention on his side and nothing in the Dublin convention will seriously prevent him.

If, on the other hand, the minister heeds unsound advice about resorting to nothing more than selective checks on third-country nationals arriving here, he will undermine at a stroke the control afforded by the passport date stamp, which catches out the clandestine entrant and the illegal overstayer alike. If he removes that control, he will have undermined all the good work that his Government achieved at Amsterdam, with my modest but enthusiastic support, by preserving Britain's border controls.

5.48 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I am pleased that the Bill is before us today. It has reminded me how old I am. I recall the time in the early 1970s when I heard a speech by Mark Hosenball, a journalist who had been excluded on national security grounds by a Labour Home Secretary for writing an article about Government communications headquarters. The then Home Secretary's decision was about as silly as that of his Conservative successor, who removed the trade union rights of people working at GCHQ. There was clearly no evidence that Mr. Hosenball represented a threat to national security.

At the time, Members of Parliament were very concerned about the procedure Mr. Hosenball faced. He was not allowed to know whether his article or something else was leading to the decision to expel him. The panel of three wise men heard the case in his absence; he was allowed to know nothing of the case against him. Although my hon. Friend the Minister said that the issue had not divided the parties, the procedure has—on that occasion and since—made some Labour Members deeply uneasy.

Let us be honest: wrong decisions have been made. For example, it was shown that in some of the Iraqi cases the information held by the national security services was inaccurate. Following that, according to the procedure, the decisions were overturned.

We needed a better procedure, and I think that we have it here. I praise my hon. Friend the Minister, and our friends in the other place, for the quality of this law. They have listened to representations made on the original draft; the rules of procedure have been published in draft, which is very helpful. We can now feel confident that there is a proper way of hearing such cases. That is not only because we had a setback in the European Court of Human Rights, but because the best way in which to defeat terrorism is to defeat it by means of a transparent and fair procedure. We do not need to use mechanisms that require a short circuit of the rules. Of course, in some circumstances those who are before a tribunal will not know the full case against them, because that could endanger national security. I am glad that the special advocate has been put in place to take care of them.

I want to refer to some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle)—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is not your hon. Friend."] I am sorry; the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle. We have quite different views on the subject but, surprisingly, he often talks good sense. He just did so, and I associate myself with the point that he made to my hon. Friend the Minister about the benefits of spending substantial sums now to process the backlog with which his party left us, so as to speed up the process and create a transparent and straightforward way of dealing with cases.

I want to answer the hon. Gentleman's concern about article 8. It does not entitle anyone to exercise the right to family life in the United Kingdom. Many years ago, I was associated with a series of cases that went to the European Court of Human Rights involving women whose foreign husbands were not allowed to join them here under the immigration rules at that time. We won those cases only because there was sex discrimination in relation to the exercise of article 8 on family life issues. There is no independent entitlement to exercise the right to family life in a particular country—although there is a right to family life.

Article 8, like article 5 and many other articles in the convention, has long explanatory parts which, in effect, deal with the issue of appreciation raised by the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison). Article 3 contains no such qualification. It is 15 words long—the shortest article in the convention—and there is no measure of appreciation when it comes to torture and inhumane and degrading treatment. That strikes me as

[Fiona Mactaggart]

proper, but when it comes to other rights—for example, the right to a fair hearing on the questions of detention, the right to family life and so on—states can curb them when that is in the interests of national security. I think that the fears that have been raised are unfounded.

I commend the Bill, because it is a sensible way of dealing with the problem. Although that problem occurs rarely, it is right for us to establish a proper procedure to deal with it.

5.54 pm

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I am pleased to say that Liberal Democrats welcome the Bill as a sensible response to the Chahal case. Colleagues far more learned and eminent than me have applied themselves to the Bill in another place and were extremely satisfied with the Government's amendments. I therefore do not intend to take up too much of the House's valuable time—time that seems especially valuable on a Thursday evening.

The general substance of the Bill is acceptable to us, so I shall refer to only two outstanding matters of concern with which I hope the Minister will be able to deal. The first is the relationship with article 3 of the European convention on human rights. With the incorporation of the convention into United Kingdom law, we accept that article 3 will have to be applied, but we would prefer human rights considerations to be made more explicit in immigration law. We would like some elaboration on how the convention, once incorporated, will be applied to the Bill.

The second issue is the right of appeal for those who have applied for asylum once the national security considerations have been dealt with and their asylum applications have been handled by the special commission. At present, it appears that they will have no further right of appeal, as an asylum seeker in other circumstances would. We would like the Minister to deal with that.

I shall conclude by saying that I am enjoying seeing the Minister smile every time there is talk of spending large amounts to clear the backlog of asylum cases.

5.56 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): I, too, am pleased to see that the Minister manages to smile and to show such good humour. He carried an enormous work load and, between them, he and the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department must cope with the fact that there have been more than 150,000 asylum applications—excluding dependants in this country—in the past four years, while well over 26,000 asylum appeals are still waiting to be determined along with nearly 10,000 non-asylum appeals. That is a considerable burden for the Minister to carry but, at the moment, he is doing so with great humour.

As the Minister knows, I founded the Immigration Advisory Service, a large national charity that provides free help and advice for those with rights of appeal in immigration matters. On a personal note, let me tell the Minister how glad we were that he took the trouble to come to our annual conference this year, where his presence and some—indeed, all—of what he said were greatly welcomed by all of us who were there to hear him.

I join my hon. Friends in welcoming the Bill, which is a sound and sensible measure. Let me highlight some aspects of it—one or two that appeal to me, and one or two that do not appeal to me so much. The make-up of the commission will, I think, make us all feel glad that such high-calibre people will be on it, including a High Court judge and a senior adjudicator. We also welcome the fact that those having their cases heard may be legally represented.

I think I am right in saying—I will be corrected if I am wrong—that legal aid is not applicable. As the Minister will know, organisations such as the Immigration Advisory Service and the Refugee Legal Council provide free help and advice, so there should be no bar to persons' being thoroughly well represented legally—particularly, perhaps, by the IAS. In accepting that, as I know he does, the Minister will also accept that that might require a little extra funding for that excellent body, which he knows all about.

A couple of points concern me slightly. I understand the need to balance national security with natural justice: that is terribly important, and perhaps the Bill has got it about right. The Minister will understand some of my concerns about clause 5(3)(a). A rule that allows proceedings without the appellant being given full details of the reasons for the decision that is the subject of the appeal could lead to the appellant feeling handicapped because, perhaps, his rights of appeal were being slightly undercut. Those who represent him may feel that they are not seeing the full picture. I fully understand the need to protect security, but I hope that the Minister will ensure that as far as possible the greatest possible assistance will be given to representatives of those who have rights of appeal.

Clause 5(3)(b) relates to proceedings in the absence of any person, including the appellant and his legal representative. Should we worry a little about that or may we hope that that will not happen and that as much positive help as possible will be given to the appellant and his representatives?

I was glad to hear the Minister speak about a right of appeal from the commission to the Court of Appeal. He said—he will correct me if I am wrong—that the appeal would be on a point of law. I am not sure what that means in practice, but perhaps the Minister can help. In appeals from the Queen's bench division or from other courts to the Court of Appeal, points of law are sometimes obvious. There is a well-defined case history upon which advocates can rely in drafting points of law. However, this situation is different in that it involves a new commission. I do not know what procedural rules or case law will govern it or whether the public interest immunity rules that apply in the Crown court and other courts will apply in the same or different terms to the commission. Therefore, any counsel or other person drafting a ground of appeal on a point of law might be punching in the dark without a set of precedents or much in the way of a track record that can be used to establish a clear point of law.

Under the Bill, it would be possible for an asylum application to come before the commission at precisely the same time as the issue of national security. Currently, if an asylum application is refused, the person has the right to go to an adjudicator and then to the Court of Appeal. I am slightly troubled about what might happen in practice. For example, if a finding relates to security, is the asylum matter dealt with separately? Is the right of appeal to the Court of Appeal from the commission on asylum only in such a two-stage application? Would the appeal be on the grounds that are normally applicable to asylum rights of appeal if it were made through channels other than the commission?

I hope that those queries are clear to the Minister. It is not possible, is it, for these proceedings to be in public? By the very nature of this important matter, that cannot happen. However, it is important for the House or an appropriate outside body to be kept properly informed about the proceedings in the commission so that there is some accountability.

There have been some good speeches. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has a hugely impressive track record and I commend his work in this area. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) contributed greatly to the debate. The Minister will be aware that although we support the Bill, we feel that some issues should be flagged up as a pointer to the fact that we shall keep an eye on the legislation to try to ensure that, although national security is given the most serious consideration, the rights of the individual who is facing a court and tribunal are protected and enhanced as much as possible and that he is not condemned or shut away. The Minister will have taken those points on board and I am grateful to him for the way in which he has listened to us.

6.4 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am grateful to hon. Members for the way in which they have participated in the debate. I listened with interest to their many points on the Bill, and I am pleased to note that there is broad agreement in all parts of the House that, in broad terms, the Bill is the best way forward. The commission will try to strike a balance between the rights of those engaged in due process and the need to protect national security. We are creating a mechanism that will fulfil our obligations in the light of the European Court of Human Rights judgment in the Chahal case.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), who leads for the Opposition on these matters, spoke about article 3 of the convention. The question was whether in the exercise of that article's provisions there was a need for balance in making our decision as to whether to give effect to it.

One of the main findings in the Chahal case was that no one could be returned to a place where he might be subjected to torture or inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment within the terms of article 3. The court concluded that Chahal could not be returned to India in the context of that article. Therefore, the guarantee is absolute in character, and a balancing exercise on a deportation issue does not come into play. We do not send people back to a place where they may be subject to breaches of article 3 provisions. The court was clear that we are not allowed to do that under the terms of the convention, and we have accepted that judgment. The hon. Member for Hertsmere said that he, too, accepted the judgment, so I assume that he will accept that that is the way in which the matter was interpreted by the court.

I was asked about the Home Secretary's right of appeal. We are still in listening mode on the Bill. We want to hear reasonable arguments from the Opposition, and most of the points by the hon. Member for Hertsmere were put reasonably. I thank him for that and for the strength of his argument. My noble Friend Lord Williams of Mostyn made the Government's position plain when the issue of the Home Secretary's right of appeal was considered in the other place. We took the view at that stage that it was not right to have an appeal based upon issues of fact, because all sorts of practical difficulties would apply.

In an appeal based on facts rather than on a point of law, the nature of the issue means that the facts would have to be revealed in the Court of Appeal. Under what procedures would that be done? What facts would be revealed to the appellant? Are we to try to create a new mechanism for the Home Secretary to exercise in such appeals to the Court of Appeal? That raises fundamental questions about what would become public in the Court of Appeal and about what legal rights of representation were before the court. It gives rise to fundamental questions about how we would operate an appeal mechanism for the Home Secretary. It might also raise questions about whether we were fulfilling all the convention provisions. I shall listen carefully to how the hon. Member for Hertsmere puts those points in Committee, but I put him on notice that, if he seeks to introduce that provision, I shall ask him how it would be dealt with in practice in the Court of Appeal.

The hon. Gentleman rightly raised costs. There was a degree of humour during the discussions on costs in another place, and rightly so. The increase in costs mainly reflects the way in which our thinking on the role of the lawyer who is appointed to represent the appellant's interests has developed. That has been the result of our on-going consultation on the Bill with interested parties and our consideration of the implications of the first draft of the procedure rules, now that we have had them from the Lord Chancellor's Department.

In a strong speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) raised issues relating to his constituent. My hon. Friend has a long record in the House of both strongly opposing terrorism and breaches of national security, and supporting human and civil rights and protecting the rights of innocent people. I acknowledge that his support for those issues is long standing.

My hon. Friend asked me some questions. Perhaps we can deal with them at greater length in Committee. He asked whether the appellant would be informed of all the allegations against him. The broad allegation will be known to the appellant—there will, of course, be a statement at the beginning of the case. A decision will be made by the commission chairman and the special advocate about what is to be disclosed. Some evidence may not be disclosed. The appellant will be given such information about the case as it is possible to give him, without putting national security at risk.

As I say, some material cannot be disclosed. In a sense, that is at the heart of the balancing act that is required in these difficult cases, but the commission will ensure that non-disclosure is kept to a bare minimum and that a decision not to disclose information is justified.

My hon. Friend and other hon. Members asked whether the special advocate could take instructions from the appellant. From my experience of practising law, the best way I can describe it is that the special advocate is like a person who is appointed by a court to represent a minor—

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

a child—or someone with a psychiatric or mental problem. That person does not take instructions from the client and he is not obliged to do what the client says.

In this case, a special advocate is not obliged to disclose information that he may become privy to. He does not have the lawyer-client relationship that one commonly expects, so the special advocate will not take any instructions from the appellant. It will be a different relationship. The European Court commended such a relationship in the Canadian context. It felt that it would balance national security and protecting the rights of the person before the court.

It must be emphasised that the appellant will have his own lawyer, who will be able to represent him in most of the proceedings. An effort will be made to ensure that as much information as possible is available to the appellant, who will be able to understand the context of most, but perhaps not all, of the proceedings before the commission.

My hon. Friend asked how long it would take to get a case before the commission. I agree that it should be done as quickly as possible. Notice of appeal will be given and the Secretary of State will, according to the draft procedure rules, have 42 days to provide the commission with his response, including a statement of the facts and a schedule of evidence. The intention is that cases will be heard as soon as practicable, but, clearly, the appellant will need to be given some time to prepare his case. There will certainly be no undue delay, as most appellants are likely to be detained.

My hon. Friend asked me whether the Home Secretary would be able to consider new evidence after a decision had been reached by the commission. It will be open to the Home Secretary to consider whether it is appropriate to review his decision, based on any new evidence, so he will have that ability, but of course if he does so and his decision is effected, a further involvement of the commission might become appropriate.

My hon. Friend asked whether such cases would be subject to the European convention. I confirm that the European convention will apply. If the House were to take the Government's view and to introduce the European convention into British law, people would not need to go to Strasbourg to bring the convention into effect.

With his long experience of dealing with many immigration cases, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) asked some pertinent questions. Again, he asked about the nature of the relationship between the lawyer and the special advocate and the appellant. He said that it was not quite British.

Mr. Wardle: It is all very British.

Mr. O'Brien: It is probably more Canadian, because the relationship seems to come out of the way in which the European Court viewed the situation in Canada, where the Government had set up a special advocate system, which the European Court commended. That is why we felt that we should go down that route. We believe that the special advocate relationship, which protects national security and the defendant, meets our European convention obligations, and we do not expect that it would be challenged.

In relation to visa cases, the hon. Gentleman asked how we square the circle whereby someone who is denied entry because we fear it for national security reasons can appeal, and someone who has no such problem cannot appeal. He may not be aware that we made a pre-election commitment to examine that and that it is part of our overall review of the way in which immigration and asylum law operates. I confirm that we are examining creating a fast-track appeal mechanism, so that we can ensure that such injustices do not occur. I hope that that will not cause us problems with the convention, as he fears.

The hon. Gentleman raised the backlog and various other wider issues. On this late Thursday evening, I shall not venture into a wide-ranging discussion on those issues, and I am sure that he will understand why.

My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) made an excellent contribution, which was based on her wide experience of dealing with immigration law. I welcome her support, from her position of having been involved in cases and having known people who have had to deal with such issues. I thank her for her support and the strength with which she put her arguments.

I thank the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) and his party for their support for the Bill. He asked about the way in which it would deal with cases where national security implications had been rejected by the commission and the person then asked for asylum. In those circumstances, the person would be dealt with in the normal course of events as an asylum seeker. I shall look at that and write to the hon. Gentleman. On the face of it, that would seem the way to proceed.

The hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) made a good contribution, and I thank him for his broad support. I am grateful to him for his kind comments about my contribution at the Immigration Advisory Service conference. I am especially grateful, because he has had a distinguished career setting up that organisation and has been deeply involved in ensuring that we protect the rights of persons who come into this country as asylum seekers or immigrants and that we do so in a reasonable and fair way.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that legal aid is not available and that we believe that the refugee legal centre and other such places will, through section 23 grants, be able to deal effectively with the cases. He suggested that they might require extra resources. Before this incarnation, I was a shadow Treasury spokesman. I learned at the feet of my right hon. Friend the current Chancellor that one does not give out money easily or wantonly. With five cases a year, I am not particularly disposed to consider applications for increases in section 23 grants. I am afraid that I have to disappoint the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman expressed some concern about clause 5(3)(a). Perhaps we can deal with that in more detail in Committee. All I shall say is that the special advocate is there to ensure that the rights of the appellant are protected. That is what he is there for and that is what we hope he will do.

The hon. Gentleman asked about our appeal amendment and what would happen in an issue involving a point of law. The principles are broadly established, and we do not envisage any great departure from them. The hon. Gentleman raised some other detailed questions, which will be best dealt with in Committee.

This short Bill is designed to remedy deficiencies in the existing procedures for dealing with individuals who are not British citizens and who constitute a threat to our national security. As I said earlier, the number of cases will be small—we estimate about five a year. However, the cases will be important and we must get the balancing act right between determining national security and the rights of the individual. I believe that the Bill seeks to do that and I welcome the support for it from both sides of the House. I am grateful to hon. Members for dealing with the Bill so constructively and fully.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

SPECIAL IMMIGRATION APPEALS COMMISSION BILL *[LORDS] [MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Special Immigration Appeals Commission Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses of a Minister of the Crown incurred in consequence of the Act.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

INCOME TAX

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Malaysia) Order 1997 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 25th June.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Singapore) Order 1997 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 25th June.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Falkland Islands) Order 1997 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 25th June.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Lesotho) Order 1997 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 25th June.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

Question agreed to.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Dawn Primarolo be added to the Committee of Public Accounts.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

LIAISON

Ordered,

That Mr. Peter Brooke, Sir Sydney Chapman, Dr. Michael Clark, Mr. David Davis, Mrs. Marion Roe, Mr. Dennis Turner and Mr. Nicholas Winterton be members of the Liaison Committee.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

Standard Spending Assessment

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

6.23 pm

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the Government's plans for the standard spending assessment system. Although I represent part of the borough, my purpose is not special pleading for Rotherham. My purpose is to put the case for those urban authorities outside London which have been systematically short-changed by Government grant settlements under the Tories. I say "short-changed", but we are not talking about small sums.

In the last decade alone, £400 million has been taken from metropolitan local authorities and allocated to others. The previous Government rigged the system to benefit some councils at the expense of others. The winners, of course, were the usual Tory suspects—Wandsworth, Kensington and Westminster. The losers were Labour authorities such as Rotherham, Barnsley, Doncaster and Sheffield in South Yorkshire.

That led many of our authorities to set up a special interest group within the Local Government Association, known as SIGOMA. Local government has a special capacity to come up with awkward and unattractive acronyms. It stands for the Special Interest Group of Metropolitan Authorities (outside London). It is now 41 strong, because the 35 metropolitan authorities have been joined recently by six unitary authorities. A total of 138 Members of Parliament represent constituencies within those authorities, including some Opposition Members.

It is important to stress that SIGOMA operates within the LGA and should not be seen as a fracture within the newly—and rightly—unified local government. It should be seen as an acceptance of the fact that those authorities have a special interest. We are looking to explain our special interest and argue our special case, but we are not looking to win special favours. We simply want a fair system of finance for local councils, and we want to work with the Government to help devise it.

We recognise the constraints on what can be done immediately. We recognise the constraint of the public spending control total and the constraint of having been in office for only a short time. However, the early signs are good.

The decision to postpone changes to the area cost adjustment is right, and a commitment to commission research on a "specific cost" approach is a better way forward than proposals in the previous Government's 1996 review. The genuine consultations with local authorities on new options for this year's SSAs suggest that, at last, we have a national Government who want to work with, not against, local government. The root and branch review of the system promised for future years is very welcome. SIGOMA authorities and Members of Parliament look forward to playing a part in that work.

That is for the long term. In the short term, Ministers must make decisions on this year's SSAs. My aim tonight is to expose the worst anomalies in the SSA system with which we have been left by the previous Government, and to encourage my hon. Friend the Minister for London and Construction to give these anomalies special attention as he and his colleagues finalise their decisions in the next week or so. We are not looking for the Government to fix our problems, because we can do that for ourselves, if we have a fair system to work within.

I have five points on my priority list for reform this year. First, we should look at the infamous "social index" for district council functions. That is the Tory index that makes Westminster the fourth most needy borough in the country. The index ranks Runnymede as 37th most deprived, and puts Windsor at 101—180 places above Rotherham, and 225 places above Barnsley.

There is also the index of additional need for county council functions which turns only on density of population. Westminster is not ranked as the fourth most deprived on that measure, but is ranked as the second most needy, topped only by Kensington and Chelsea. Those two authorities have the greatest proportion of properties in the country valued at over £320,000 for the purposes of the council tax. That is absurd, iniquitous and indefensible.

Over the summer, the Government have been looking at new indices of social need for district councils and the introduction of a new index for counties. I urge Ministers to finish the job and to bring in changes for the coming settlement.

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster, Central): Is my hon. Friend aware that Doncaster metropolitan borough council faces difficulties similar to those that he is describing? However, it might be possible to alleviate some of the service cuts this year if the rate capping limit was altered to allow the council to use its collection fund. That fund has been accumulated from a successful council tax collection scheme.

The use of that fund would not alter the amount ultimately paid by council tax payers, nor would it affect the public sector borrowing requirement. Does my hon. Friend agree that, if Ministers were to take that matter into consideration when setting rate capping limits, it could improve the position of councils that have collection funds?

Mr. Healey: My hon. Friend makes a good point. According to her analysis, efficient local councils are being penalised by being more efficient than the targets set for them. I hope that the Minister will bear that point in mind when he replies.

The second point on my priority list for change is how an area's population is counted. It is simple enough. Tourists and commuters are added to the resident population, but they are added on the basis that two tourists staying in an hotel place the same burden on a council as one resident, and six commuters cost the council the same as one resident. We can guess who wins on that basis.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that people in our constituencies are expecting a radical change in the SSA system this year? In particular, we want the Kent and York studies to be part of the review. We are well aware that they are not perfect, but the present system is an absolute scandal. St. Helens and Westminster have the same population, yet Westminster receives £995 in grant per person, while St. Helens receives only £583.

My council, like my hon. Friend's, has had to make tremendous cuts over the past few years. Since 1993, it has made cuts totalling £16 million, but it still had the highest increase in council tax in the north-west last year. Is it not crucial that, even if the two studies are not completed and are not perfect, some dramatic change must take place this year if we are to avoid serious cuts in our education and social services, as well as other council services?

Mr. Healey: If I did not know my hon. Friend better, I would have thought that he intervened while I was in full flow in an attempt to stop me attacking Westminster council. He made an important point. He said that some councils were expecting radical change, but I am not as confident as my hon. Friend, as I believe that the scope for radical change this year is relatively limited. However, my hon. Friend mentioned a matter which is on my list of five priorities—the studies on care services.

I shall return to the theme that I was warming to before I was interrupted—the question of who wins when, for the purposes of grant, we count commuters and people who are staying overnight in hotels. Westminster wins handsomely. Some 81 per cent. is added to its resident population for SSA purposes, while 12 per cent. of those staying in hotels are assumed for grant purposes to be staying in overcrowded accommodation.

The upshot of those tricks in the Tory system is that this year's SSA for Westminster is £249 million, while its budget is just £215 million. In other words, this year Westminster is spending 14 per cent. less than the Government say it needs and are giving it in grant. That area is ripe for action by a Government determined to restore some fairness to the local government financing system.

Thirdly—I promise not to mention Westminster again—let us consider two serious academic studies, both mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts), designed to rebate SSAs for two critical areas of service: children's social services and residential care for elderly people.

York university and the Department of Health have studied children who come into contact with social services and what characterises their background areas. They have extrapolated the data nationally to produce a new formula. The methodology and the model are accepted, and the main research and work was completed a full 12 months ago.

Kent university has produced a soundly based, independently developed model for elderly people in residential care. It looks at the circumstances of people before they move into residential homes. The present SSA for elderly care predates community care. It is rooted in the 1980s, when local authorities were responsible only for financing and maintaining people in their own residential homes, whereas they are now responsible for all community care provision. That prospective SSA gives us an important and proper indicator of likely need.

I recognise that there are subsidiary questions about weightings, costings and the use of particular proxies within the equation, but with both those options for reform, the models are sound, well researched and overdue. I hope that Ministers will have the courage to introduce them in this year's settlement, even if we have to fine-tune them for future settlements.

Fourthly, I want briefly to discuss capital SSAs. Unlike many other SSAs, that critical SSA is based not on patterns of past spending, but on notional totals introduced in one big hit in 1990.

That means that urban authorities such as Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield and Rotherham, which invested heavily in large-scale city centre regeneration, were clobbered. Rotherham still has a £6-million-a-year gap between the cost of actual borrowing and the level of notional borrowing used to determine the capital SSA. Again, like many other SSA blocks, the commitment to service capital debt cannot be varied by councils year on year; it cannot be cut by policy change or by reductions in service.

Two options for change in that area have been developed by the Department's settlement working group—one to move from notional to actual capital commitments for individual authorities, and the other to move to an actual base for classes of authorities. I urge the Minister seriously to consider either of those changes for this year.

Fifthly and finally, I want to talk about the interplay between the SSA and the cap. An increase in SSA does not help areas such as Rotherham to meet local needs if there is not a pound-for-pound increase in the cap. We expect an announcement on and confirmation of the capping rules for next year at the same time as the announcement of the provisional SSA, which simply underlines the integral link between the two. As Ministers reach their final decisions over the next fortnight or so, I simply ask them to bear that matter in mind.

Mr. Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): My hon. Friend has outlined many of the inadequacies of the current formula-funded mechanism. I am sure that he agrees that it cannot be right for there to be an 80 per cent. expenditure differential per head between the winners and some of the losers—such as the Barnsleys, the Doncasters and the Rotherhams of this world—under the SSA formula.

I accept, as I am sure my hon. Friend accepts, that there will be winners and losers under any formula-funded mechanism. Because of the enormous differential, does he not agree that the Government—if they cannot radically overhaul the SSA system this year—should consider introducing some form of damping mechanism to reduce the current gap between the winners and the losers?

Mr. Healey: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A damping element will be crucial in the impact that any changes to the SSA system will have in subsequent years on both winner and loser authorities. He also cited figures that some hon. Members are familiar with and that many of us have used. That list of figures shows how, throughout the Tory years, some authorities consistently won and others consistently lost, and the list is endless. I got fed up looking at league tables in which Tory authorities were consistently on top and authorities in strong, traditional Labour areas—such as South Yorkshire—were consistently near the bottom.

The prospects for next year are good. At last, it looks as if we have a Government who are ready to act on the injustices that we inherited from the Tories—although Ministers are determined to make councils argue their case. The SIGOMA group accepts that challenge, because its case is strong.

We look forward to a settlement for next year that begins the job of rebalancing the system. Moreover, we look forward to such a settlement as only the first step in establishing a fair framework for council finance, which will at last provide us with a period of long-term stability in relations between local and national Government.

6.41 pm

The Minister for London and Construction (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) on his success in securing this debate, and on providing us with an opportunity to discuss a subject that is of particular concern for many local authorities, whose interests within the Local Government Association are represented by the Special Interest Group of Metropolitan Authorities (outside London)—or SIGOMA, as it is commonly known. As my hon. Friend said, that is an unattractive acronym, but it encompasses many authorities that have very real needs, of which the Government are extremely mindful.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member also on his generosity in willingly allowing so many interventions in his speech by other hon. Members. I will attempt to do justice to the comments made in the debate by him and by my hon. Friends the Members for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts) and for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Mr. Ennis).

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth will be aware that we are in the process of finalising our proposals for the local government revenue finance settlement for 1998-99. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will make a statement on his proposals later in the autumn.

We have considered whether it would possible to be more helpful to the House and to local authorities by making the statement earlier than usual. However, I hope that hon. Members and local authorities will understand that we must use the most up-to-date data to ensure that the distribution is as fair as possible. Moreover, we must spend time ensuring that we get the very detailed calculations right. Authorities might like to note that, despite our best efforts, it seems unlikely that the statement will be made before December.

As we have not announced the provisional settlement, the House will appreciate that I am not in a position to give a detailed response to the matters raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth. SIGOMA will no doubt wish to consider its concerns in the light of our proposals. If he and other hon. Members would like it, I should be very happy, during the consultation on the settlement, to meet a delegation from SIGOMA.

Although I am not able to give detailed responses, I should like to reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth that we are very well aware of the concerns that he has articulated in this debate and that have been brought to our attention by many authorities both inside and outside SIGOMA. We promised a fairer distribution of Government grants to local authorities, and, later in my reply, I will explain the work that we have undertaken with local authorities to ensure that we deliver on that pledge in the coming settlement.

First, however, I should like to explain the far-reaching programme of work that we have initiated to review local government finance, because the conclusions of that review will have important implications for all local authorities. The review—which was announced on 24 July 1997, in parallel with the comprehensive spending review—is being conducted by task groups comprising officials and representatives from the Local Government Association.

One of the review's key elements is to examine the rationale for and effectiveness of measures to reduce needs and resource inequalities. That part of the review will examine more fundamental issues in relation to the future shape of SSAs.

We intend, for example, to commission research to investigate the scope for SSA formulae based on data other than historic spending by individual local authorities. One piece of work is expected to examine the extent to which the technique used by York university in its review of the children's social services formula—to which my hon. Friend referred—might be used for other SSA elements. Another project is due to examine whether the statistical technique that underlies most existing SSA formulae can be usefully applied more widely to non-expenditure data.

Those involved in our review of local government finance are also standing back from the technical detail to consider whether SSAs should be made more detailed, to deal more accurately with some of the spending needs that currently are reflected only implicitly. I should say, however, that others believe that the current system is too opaque and incomprehensible, and that changes should be made in the other direction, so that SSAs become easier to understand.

That provides a classic illustration of the dilemma facing any Government, and certainly this Government, in trying to ensure that we create a system that is not only fair but not totally incomprehensible, and so detailed as to defy understanding.

The review is touching also on wider distribution issues, such as equalisation, which is the process of enabling local authorities to provide a similar standard of service while charging similar council tax rates, despite variations in spending needs, costs and local tax bases. We are also reviewing the current arrangements for local authority revenue raising—including full consultation with business—and whether the business rate should be set locally.

We are examining ways in which to encourage cost-effective and efficient delivery of services. That work is being conducted in parallel with the development of a framework for the introduction of best value. We are considering what must be done so that we can end crude and universal capping and what reserve powers we will retain to control excessive tax rises. The final element of the review is to consider possible improvements to the capital finance system, including an examination of the allocation system.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I cannot give way, because this is a time-limited debate. As the hon. Gentleman will understand, I have to reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and other hon. Members who spoke in the debate.

From late autumn onwards, key outputs from the review will consist of a short sequence of consultation papers on specific aspects of the system, followed in the spring by proposals for change contained in a White Paper on local government. The White Paper will cover both finance and other, non-financial changes, including best value and democratic innovation.

I shall now deal with the work that we have been doing this year to ensure a fairer grant distribution. SSAs form the basis for the distribution of revenue support grant and are based on measures of spending need that apply to all local authorities. SSA calculation is discussed with representatives of local government. Having said that, we realise that there are ways in which SSA distribution might be improved to enable a fairer distribution of Government grant between local authorities.

My officials, together with those in other Departments, have covered a great deal of ground this year in discussing with local government, in the SSA sub-group, possible changes to SSA formulae for 1998-99. We are currently considering the options that are on the table, and our provisional decisions will be announced later in the autumn.

Among the issues that have been considered this year are several about which my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and, indeed, Rotherham council and other SIGOMA authorities have expressed concern. We have reviewed the social and economic indices in the all other services SSA. This review involved the scrutiny of more than 100 possible indicators and led to agreement with local government on a set of ground rules to be applied in the statistical process involved. As with all investigation of changes to SSA methodology, the work has been carried out in the open.

With colleagues in the Department of Health, we have examined most of the elements of the personal social services SSA this year. This includes a review of the other social services index in the other social services SSA, which followed the same approach as the review of the social and economic indices.

Together with researchers at York university, to whom we have already alluded, we have done some more work on a new formula to reflect the need to spend on children's social services following the implementation of the Children Act 1989. Many local authorities consider it a clear improvement on the present formula, but others believe that some important issues have yet to be resolved. One such issue is the extent to which variations in fostering costs are reflected, and another is whether there should be an indicator of ethnicity.

In a similar vein, we have taken forward the work done last year by Kent university in deriving a formula for elderly residential social services which takes account of the community care changes of 1993. This has also had a mixed reception. Some authorities believe that it should be implemented because they think it is a clear improvement on the present formula; others would like further investigation of some of the data before a change is adopted.

The way in which visitors and commuters are treated in the all other services SSA formula has also been the subject of investigation. The fact that the present formula implicitly assumes that visitors and commuters are as deprived as the people who live in the area to which they travel has often been criticised.

There are several options for changing this aspect of the formula for 1998-99. The available options cover a range of different assumptions as to how the costs relating to visitors and commuters in areas of high population density or sparsity should be applied. We shall need to decide whether any of the options represents a clear improvement on the present formula.

The area cost adjustment allows for higher costs in London and the rest of the south-east. It is another element of SSAs which is often subject to criticism. More work on this has been done this year to build on the findings of the 1996 Elliott review. Although those options remain available for consideration, we have recently announced that we intend to commission further research to examine the specific cost approach to calculating the ACA. The research is expected to be concluded in May next year.

Metropolitan authorities have this year been involved in discussions about the capital financing SSA, the other issue raised by my hon. Friend. An option using figures for actual, rather than notional, levels of debt in 1990 has been proposed, and several more technical adjustments have been suggested. We recognise that a move to the use of actual debt has many advocates, including my hon. Friend, but it also has many opponents. Although some see it as a more accurate way of reflecting authorities' need for spending, others suggest that it would unfairly penalise authorities which have chosen to pay off their debts.

I have outlined just some of the aspects of SSA methodology which have been considered this year. They highlight the difficulty of trying to achieve a balance and fairness. We are clear that any system we adopt must be lasting and must command the confidence of local government. We will not rush into changes.

For that reason, I have to disappoint my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North, who called for radical changes this year. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth rightly recognised, we have to be very careful about making changes that will have a dramatic effect on local authority budgets. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough made that very point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central mentioned the collection fund. Sums raised in one year in excess of the anticipated yield of council tax must rightly be applied to the following year's budget; otherwise, there could be a perverse incentive for authorities to collect more than the council needed to meet its budget.

This has been an interesting debate on an important subject, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth for giving us the opportunity. I hope that I have been able to show the Government's real concern to ensure a move towards a fairer system of support for local authority spending. I hope that, as and when my hon. Friend sees the results of our discussions later this autumn, he will feel that his confidence that we are making progress is fully justified.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes to Seven o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 28 July 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Operation Quantum

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are being used to evaluate the options for Operation Quantum. [10100]

Ms Quin: The suppliers' proposals were evaluated using a number of criteria under the headings business fit, viability and commercial assessment.

The criteria for the evaluation of the options within the proposals remain to be defined. They will include the closest attention to the proposals' impact on Prison Service staff.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many options are currently being considered in regard to Operation Quantum which are either *(a)* privately run, *(b)* mixed economy and *(c)* in partnership; and what assessment he had made of the most cost-effective option. [10090]

Ms Quin: This information is treated as commercial in confidence, being part of a competitive procurement between a number of suppliers.

No assessment has yet been made of the cost-effectiveness of any of the options.

Prison Service

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the status of HM Prison Service as a service provider under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 1996. [10396]

Ms Quin: I have no record of having received such representations.

Metrication Directives

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the effects which implementation of EC directives 80/181 and 89/617 has had on the ability of the police to identify suspects. [10335]

Mr. Michael: The implementation of these directives represented the final stage of the process of replacing imperial units with metric units as the primary system of measurement. We have no evidence that the adoption of metric units has affected the ability of the police to identify suspects.

Stalking

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time between a stalking complaint being made to the police and a prosecution being brought. [10368]

Mr. Michael: Information is not held centrally on the time taken by the police to investigate reported breaches of the criminal law. The length of time taken to conduct an investigation will vary depending on the circumstances of the case. There are non-statutory time guidelines agreed by all the criminal justice agencies that cover each stage of the process from granting of police bail to commencement of a Crown court trial. Where a person is granted police bail with a duty to return to the police station, the maximum time guideline is three weeks unless a protracted investigation or other compelling consideration is involved. The Government are determined to cut delays in the criminal justice system, starting with a speeding up of youth justice.

The new criminal offences created by the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 came into force on 16 June 1997 and it is too soon to make any assessment of the time taken to deal with offences under the Act.

Exotic Pets

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidelines his Department issues to pet shops and traders on the sale of exotic pets; and if he will make a statement; [10787]

(2) what plans he has to introduce licences for those keeping exotic animals not defined by statute as dangerous; and if he will make a statement. [10784]

Mr. George Howarth: The Department has not issued guidelines to pet shops about the sale of exotic pets. The Pet Animals Act 1951, as amended in 1983, controls the sale of all animals as pets from pet shops. The Act requires any person keeping a pet shop to be licensed by the local authority.

Before granting a licence, the authority must satisfy itself that the animals are kept in accommodation that is suitable and clean, that they are supplied with appropriate food and drink and that they are protected from disease and fire. The local authority may inspect licensed premises at all reasonable times.

There are no plans to introduce licences for those keeping animals, including exotic animals. The welfare of exotic animals kept as pets is provided for under the Protection of Animals Act 1911, which makes it an offence to ill treat or cause any unnecessary suffering to any domestic or captive animal.

Fatuma Njoki Ali Juma

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds the letter dated 20 July 1996 supplied by the assistant registrar Mohammedan of marriage and divorces, Nairobi is considered deficient as documentary evidence of the divorce in Kenya of Fatuma Njoki Ali Juma; and what further documentary evidence he requires. [10988]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The immigration and nationality directorate has no reason to doubt the genuineness of the divorce certificate in question, but inquiries have been complicated by the fact that when Fatuma Juma applied for entry clearance to join her current husband she told the entry clearance officer in Nairobi that she had not previously been married.

Having considered all aspects of the case, the immigration and nationality directorate does not now propose to remove Fatuma Juma as an illegal entrant.

Immigration

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been admitted to the country since 5 February 1996 on the basis of a written sponsorship undertaking. [10288]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I regret that the information requested is not available because it is not compiled.

European Convention on Human Rights

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government's proposals for incorporation of the European convention on human rights into British law will empower the judiciary to overturn parliamentary statutes. [10400]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are still considering the detail of the incorporation scheme, but we attach great importance to maintaining parliamentary sovereignty and note the difficulties with the idea that the courts should be able to set aside Acts of Parliament.

Security Service

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many British citizens M15 holds information. [10449]

Mr. Straw: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to disclose information about operational matters relating to the Security Service.

I do not propose to depart from that practice.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce measures to ensure blood samples are taken from those dying after *(a)* ecstasy and *(b)* other illegal substance use. [11013]

Mr. George Howarth: Coroners are responsible for investigating the sudden, violent and unnatural deaths reported to them and already have powers to request the testing of blood samples in order to establish the medical cause of death.

Wrongful Convictions

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a system whereby released prisoners who have served long sentences prior to the Court of Appeal finding them to have been wrongfully convicted may receive counselling and other help in making necessary readjustments following their release. [7399]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 14 July 1997]:* Following their release from prison in any circumstances, the responsibility for meeting the health care needs of individuals lies with the national health service. It is open to anyone wishing to receive counselling support following release to seek a referral through his or her general practitioner. Alternatively, in cases of wrongful conviction where it has been established that an individual qualifies for payment of compensation, he or she may apply for an interim payment to help alleviate any immediate financial difficulties or to pay for private counselling or other care. Prison Service discharge procedures include giving prisoners advice about the support services available to them and the probation service is expected to provide resettlement advice or help to released prisoners who ask for it.

Police Committees and Groups

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each local authority police committee and community police consultative group in England and Wales. [10470]

Mr. Michael: Under the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, now consolidated in the Police Act 1996, the 41 local authority police committees outside London were replaced on 1 April 1995 by police authorities which are free-standing corporate bodies.

The 41 police authorities in England and Wales as listed in schedule 1 to the Police Act 1996 are:

England

Avon and Somerset
Bedfordshire
Cambridgeshire
Cheshire
Cleveland
Cumbria
Derbyshire
Devon and Cornwall
Dorset
Durham
Essex
Gloucestershire
Greater Manchester
Hampshire
Hertfordshire
Humberside
Kent
Lancashire
Leicestershire
Lincolnshire
Merseyside
Norfolk
Northamptonshire
Northumbria
North Yorkshire
Nottinghamshire
South Yorkshire
Staffordshire
Suffolk
Surrey
Sussex
Thames Valley
Warwickshire
West Mercia
West Midlands
West Yorkshire
Wiltshire.

Wales
Dyfed Powys
Gwent
North Wales
South Wales.

The 1994 Act did not alter the police authority arrangements for London. The police authorities for the metropolitan police area and the City of London police area are the Home Secretary and the Corporation of London respectively.

Details of community police consultative groups are not held centrally. Each police authority has a network of these groups to obtain the views of the local community about the policing of their area. The organisation of these networks varies in different areas but is often based on police force divisions or sub-divisions.

Young Offenders (Mental Health)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what studies his Department has evaluated into the correlation between attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder and juvenile crime; if he will make it his policy to ensure that juveniles convicted of more than three crimes should be assessed for ADHD by a medical practitioner competent in the pharmacological treatment of this condition; and if he will make a statement; [10506]

(2) if he will introduce measures to ensure that *(a)* the police and *(b)* the Crown Prosecution Service obtain an assessment for attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder for children and adolescents convicted of more than three crimes; and if he will make a statement. [10505]

Mr. Michael: The incidence of hyperactivity, attention deficit and impulsivity at ages eight to 10 years has been found independently to predict future juvenile convictions. This finding arises from work by the Cambridge study of delinquent development, which was largely funded by the Home Office. Of course, the causes of juvenile delinquency are complex and wide ranging and hyperactivity is only one of many indicators. Research indicates that the following factors are particularly significant: being male; being brought up by a criminal parent or parents; living in a family with multiple problems; experiencing poor parenting and a lack of supervision; poor discipline in the family and at school; experiencing failure and disaffection at school; associating with delinquent friends; and having brothers and sisters who offend.

However, the Government are developing policies to bring about early identification of social and medical factors which may act as a trigger to delinquent behaviour or increase the likelihood of misbehaviour, not least by the inquiries at the "final warning" stage which we intend should lead to targeted intervention. The findings of the Cambridge study and other evidence of delinquent development will be taken into account as we draw up plans for the final warning which we intend to include in the Crime and Disorder Bill later this Session.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the degree of correlation between emotional disturbance among young people and committal to detention centres; what estimate he has made of the proportion of the cost of detention centres accounted for by such young people; and if he will make a statement. [10538]

Ms Quin: Detention centres and youth custody centres were replaced by young offender institutions in 1988.

No such assessment has been made. The reports of two surveys of prisoners' mental health undertaken by the Institute of Psychiatry include findings about the prevalence of mental disorder in young men, although data on young women were not collated separately from data on adult women.

The first survey, the report of which was published by the Home Office in 1991 and entitled "Mentally Disordered Prisoners", estimated that 33 per cent. of sentenced male young offenders could be diagnosed as suffering from some form of mental disorder, including harmful or dependent use of substances, excluding cannabis. The corresponding figure for unsentenced young men in the report of the second survey, published by the Home Office in 1996 as "Mental Disorder in Remand Prisoners", was 53 per cent.

No statistics are available centrally on which to estimate the additional costs of caring for, and treating, prisoners with emotional or mental health problems, as distinct from those who do not have such problems.

Official Secrets Act 1989

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make it his policy to seek to amend the Official Secrets Act 1989 by the insertion of a public interest defence; [10608]

(2) what plans he has to repeal the Official Secrets Act 1989. [10612]

Mr. Michael *[holding answers 25 July 1997]:* The Official Secrets Act 1989 protects only a very narrow range of information and only if the disclosure is likely to cause damage. We have no plans to repeal the Act since this would risk allowing disclosures which might harm the national interest.

With regard to a public interest defence, the 1989 Act is not concerned with embarrassing disclosures; it is concerned with disclosures that give rise to specific kinds of harm to the national interest. It is difficult to envisage how a public interest defence could be appropriately deployed in this narrow and specific set of circumstances. A person who knowingly harms the public interest so seriously that a prosecution under the Act would be justified should be criminally liable and it is difficult to see circumstances in which that harm could be disregarded because of the motives of the individual. If a prosecution is brought, the court is able to consider all the circumstances of the case in imposing an appropriate sentence and motivation would be a factor to be included in that consideration.

There is no question of a Crown servant needing to risk criminal penalties to bring suspicions of wrongdoing to the attention of higher authorities. Under the civil service code, introduced with effect from 1 January 1996, civil servants are required to report wrongdoing to the appropriate authorities. Where a civil servant has reported such a matter and believes that the response does not represent a reasonable response to the grounds of his or her concern, he or she may report the matter in writing to the civil service commissioners.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Government Property Lawyers

Mr. Healey: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects *(a)* to lay before Parliament and *(b)* to publish the report and accounts of the Government Property Lawyers for 1996–97. [11416]

The Attorney-General: The annual report and accounts of the Government Property Lawyers were laid before Parliament on Friday and are now published.

Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Television

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people subscribed to cable or satellite television in each year since 1979. [10831]

Mr. Fisher: I understand from the Independent Television Commission that data were not collected consistently until 1986. Cable data from the commission for years from 1986 are given in the table. The ITC does not collect data directly on the number of satellite subscribers, but survey estimates of the number of satellite homes from 1989 available from the Broadcasters Audience Research Board are also given:

Cable		*Satellite*	
Year	*Homes connected*	*Year*	*Homes connected*
January 1986	127,481	—	—
January 1987	188,459	—	—
January 1988	249,642	—	—
January 1989	272,559	March 1989	67,000
January 1990	302,438	March 1990	681,000
January 1991	422,705	January 1991	1,312,000
January 1992	490,059	February 1992	1,783,000
January 1993	652,366	January 1993	2,297,000
January 1994	783,089	January 1994	2,664,000
January 1995	1,055,362	January 1995	2,970,000
January 1996	1,419,865	January 1996	3,472,000
January 1997	1,965,911	January 1997	3,734,000

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many satellite television channels were available in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1996. [10832]

Mr. Fisher: No satellite channels were available in the UK in 1979. By the end of 1996, the Independent Television Commission had granted licences for 150 satellite television services. The commission estimates that about two thirds of these were operational. Viewers in the UK with the necessary reception equipment could also receive a similar number of services from overseas.

Art, Dance and Music (Lottery Funding)

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to provide lottery funding for local authorities to support extra-curricular *(a)* arts, *(b)* dance and *(c)* music classes; and if he will make a statement. [10375]

Mr. Fisher: In the White Paper my Department launched on 21 July, we outlined plans for out-of-school activities which would allow local education authorities and others to seek lottery funding to support a wide range of creative projects. We also gave a specific example of how the new opportunities fund might support schools programmes in music teaching.

Quangos

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the quangos within his Department's responsibility which he has to date announced his intention *(a)* to abolish and *(b)* to make subject to a significant element of democratic accountability. [9673]

Mr. Tom Clarke *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has announced a review of quangos with the aim of reducing their overall number and proposes to issue a discussion paper on how democratic oversight of unelected public bodies might best be enhanced. We shall consider the future of all the bodies in the responsibility of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport as part of the departmental spending review.

Museums and Galleries

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the attendance figures for the financial year ended 31 March reported by the national museums and galleries for which he is responsible, broken down into the individual institutions, including their outstations, with figures in each case of the percentage change on the attendance figures for the preceding year. [8976]

Mr. Fisher *[holding answer 21 July 1997]:* The table lists the number of visits to the 12 national museums and galleries in England for the financial year ended 31 March 1997. The information has been provided by the institutions. The year-on-year changes are affected by a number of factors, including variations to the exhibition programmes of each of the institutions and closures to gallery spaces due to major refurbishments.

	Number of visits in 1995–96 (millions)	Number of visits in 1996–97 (millions)	Percentage increase/decrease over the previous year[1]
British Museum[2]	6.10	6.80	+11.5
Imperial War Museum	1.30	1.28	–1.5
Lambeth Road	0.46	0.49	+6.5
HMS Belfast	0.22	0.19	–13.6
Cabinet War Rooms	0.25	0.23	–8
Duxford Airfield	0.37	0.37	0
National Gallery[2]	4.5	5.0	+11.1
National Maritime Museum[3]	0.58	0.48	–17.2
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside[4]	1.23	1.22	–0.8
Liverpool Museum	0.47	0.40	–14.9
Maritime Museum	0.35	0.36	+2.9
Walker Art Gallery	0.23	0.20	–13
Lady Lever Art Gallery	0.06	0.07	+16.7
Sudley House	0.03	0.03	0
Museum of Liverpool Life	0.09	0.13	+44.5
Conservation Centre	—	0.03	—
National Portrait Gallery[2,5]	0.82	0.86	+4.9
Natural History Museum	1.46	1.80	+23.3
South Kensington	1.41	1.75	+24.1
Zoological Museum at Tring	0.05	0.05	0
National Museum of Science and Industry	2.70	2.53	–6.4
Science Museum	1.62	1.47	–9.3
National Museum of Photography and Film at Bradford	0.61	0.62	+1.6
National Railway Museum at York	0.43	0.40	–6.8
Wroughton	0.04	0.04	0
Tate Gallery[2]	3.06	2.48	–19.0
Millbank	2.38	1.83	–23.1
Liverpool	0.49	0.46	–6.1
St. Ives	0.19	0.19	0
Victoria and Albert Museum[6]	1.54	1.59	+3.2
South Kensington	1.17	1.25	+6.8
Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood[2]	0.19	0.17	–10.5
Theatre Museum	0.11	0.12	+9.1
Wellington Museum	0.07	0.05	–28.6
Wallace Collection[2]	0.16	0.18	+12.5
Royal Armouries[7]	0.24	0.79	+229.1
Museum of Artillery at Fort Nelson	0.24	0.32	+31.0
New Museum at Leeds	—	0.47	—

[1] Percentage changes are calculated by reference to the rounded figures, not the underlying data.

[2] The number of visits to premises for which admission is not charged is estimated or counted by other means.

[3] The figure for the national maritime museum includes the old royal observatory and Queen's house.

[4] National museums and galleries on Merseyside's conservation centre opened to the public in October 1996. It introduced admission charges to all its institutions on 8 July 1997. Therefore, figures before these dates are estimates only.

[5] Combined attendance at Bodelwyddan castle, operated by an independent charitable trust, Gawthorpe hall, Beningbrough hall and Montacute house, operated by the National Trust, was 815,156 in 1995–96 and 857,085 in 1996–97. These buildings house part of the national portrait gallery's collection.

[6] Prior to 1 October 1996, the Victoria and Albert museum at south Kensington operated a policy of suggested donations.

[7] It is not possible to identify accurately the number of visits to the royal armouries in HM tower of London. These are contained within the figure issued by the Historic Royal Palaces agency. The figures are not available for 1995–96 for visitors to royal armouries at Leeds.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid (Fees)

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when legal aid fees for advice and assistance were last set; what the hourly rate is; and what the hourly rate would currently be if it had been uprated in line with *(a)* inflation and *(b)* increases in average professional civil service pay rates. [10165]

Mr. Hoon: The present remuneration rates for legal aid advice and assistance were set in April 1996. It is not possible to provide figures adjusted by the increase in professional civil servant pay rates because pay levels are determined by Departments. Central figures are not kept and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The table shows the current rates and the rates uprated by inflation and by the increase in public administration earnings.

	Green form rates £	*Uprated by GDP* £	*Uprated by increase in public administration earnings*[1] £
Firms holding a franchise from the Legal Aid Board			
London			
Preparation	48.25	49.26	49.07
Travelling and waiting	25.50	26.14	25.93
Letter and telephone calls	3.70	3.79	3.76
National			
Preparation	45.50	46.64	46.27
Travelling and waiting	25.50	26.14	25.93
Letter and telephone calls	3.55	3.64	3.61
All Other Firms			
London			
Preparation	46.50	47.66	47.29
Travelling and waiting	24.50	25.11	24.92
Letter and telephone calls	3.55	3.64	3.61
National			
Preparation	44.00	45.10	44.75
Travelling and waiting	24.50	25.11	24.92
Letter and telephone calls	3.40	3.49	3.46

[1] Source: *Employment Gazette.*

Legal Aid (Medical Negligence)

Mr. Lock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much was paid out by the Legal Aid Board in respect of medical negligence legal actions brought against NHS trusts and health authorities in irrecoverable costs; and what was the total sum recovered in damages in such cases in the last three years. [10084]

Mr. Hoon: Information in the form requested is not available because the Legal Aid Board's database does not record the name or status of the assisted party's opponent. However, the total paid out of the legal aid fund and recoveries in medical negligence cases in each of the last three years was as follows:

	Gross payments £	*Damages recovered* £	*Costs recovered/ set off* £	*Net costs to fund* £
1994–95	38,563,724	41,411,411	13,341,879	23,920,296
1995–96	50,199,270	65,809,664	22,035,516	26,856,210
1996–97	54,331,152	74,186,110	25,846,020	27,207,573

Frederick West

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the estate of the late Frederick West is now solvent. [10136]

Mr. Hoon: The Government have no involvement with the West estate. The Official Solicitor, who is independent of the Government, has been appointed as administrator of the West estate by the court. Like any other administrator, he is accountable only to the court and, through the court, to the beneficiaries. The distribution of the estate and any income derived from it is a matter of law. Any questions on the estate should be addressed to the Official Solicitor.

TREASURY

Monetary Policy Committee

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set up a register of interests for the members of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England. [10378]

Mrs. Liddell: The Chancellor's letter of 6 May to the Governor setting out the new monetary policy framework states that the four members of the Monetary Policy Committee appointed from outside the Bank will be allowed to engage in other activities only if they do not give rise to a conflict of interest and that they must seek the Chancellor's approval before so doing. They will provide the Bank with a full list of any outside activities. All the other members of the committee are subject to the Bank's terms and conditions of service for staff, which prohibit any activities that might lead to a conflict of interest. In the light of these provisions, there is no need for a register of interests for the members of the committee.

International Development

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what ways the Treasury is contributing to the forthcoming White Paper on international development. [10440]

Mrs. Liddell: The Treasury is one of a number of Government Departments consulted by the Department for International Development on the White Paper, and our contributions will be set out in that document.

Fuel

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many litres of *(a)* unleaded and *(b)* four-star petrol were sold in each of the last five years; and how much he estimates the reduced rate of excise on unleaded petrol, relative to that of four-star petrol, cost the Exchequer over the same period. [10253]

Dawn Primarolo: The amount of *(a)* unleaded petrol and *(b)* four-star petrol released for consumption in the last five years was:

Million litres

	Unleaded petrol	*Leaded petrol*
1992–93	15,415	16,485
1993–94	16,928	14,154
1994–95	18,070	12,583
1995–96	19,177	10,843
1996–97	20,552	9,198

On the assumption that the unleaded share has not increased after 1992–93 in the absence of the duty differential, the cost to the Exchequer of the unleaded rate being less than the leaded rate would have been approximately £4.5 billion. This is an estimate because factors other than the duty differential would have affected the unleaded share.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress he has made in obtaining the necessary authorisation at EC level for reducing the duty on ultra-low-sulphur diesel. [10254]

Dawn Primarolo: The necessary EC derogation has now been obtained. A reduced rate of excise duty on ultra-low-sulphur diesel will be introduced as soon as possible after Royal Assent to the current Finance Bill.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's policy on maintaining the percentage differential on the rate of excise between unleaded petrol and four-star petrol. [10250]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government remain committed to a tax incentive to discourage drivers from switching from unleaded to leaded petrol. The Chancellor took the view in his last Budget to leave the differential unchanged in cash terms.

Cross-border Shopping

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *105*, if the latest estimated figures of duty revenues lost as a result of cross-border shopping include VAT. [9942]

Dawn Primarolo: Figures given in the answer of 1 July were for excise duty only and did not include any amounts for VAT.

Customs' estimate of excise duty and VAT revenues lost from legitimate cross-border shopping for alcohol and tobacco products for the year ending 30 June 1996 is given in the table.

Revenue losses from cross-border shopping (£ million)

Product type	*Excise duty*	*VAT*	*Total revenue*
Beer	25	15	40
Wine	75	35	105
Spirits	45	15	60
Tobacco products	55	15	70
Total	200	75	275

Figures have been independently rounded to £5 million. Figures in this answer assume that 50 per cent. of alcohol purchased is additional consumption; this assumption is currently under review.

Customs' estimate of total revenue evasion—excise duty and VAT—through smuggling of alcohol and tobacco products, excluding any losses from commercial fraud, is set out in the table. The actual loss to the Exchequer will be less than the amount of revenue evaded, as some smuggling is likely to represent additional consumption rather than substituting for similar goods bought in the UK.

Revenue evaded through smuggling (£ million)

Product type	*Excise duty*	*VAT*	*Total revenue*
Beer	75	35	110
Wine	35	15	50
Spirits	40	10	50
Hand-rolling tobacco	335	85	425
Cigarettes and other tobacco products	110	25	135
Total	590	175	770

Figures have been independently rounded to £5 million. Components may not therefore sum to the totals given.

Offshore Trusts

Mr. Prior: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to legislate against tax avoidance schemes relating to offshore trusts in Jersey; [10078]

(2) what is his Department's policy towards British companies setting up employee offshore trusts with the intention of avoiding capital gains tax. [10077]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor announced in his Budget a wide-ranging review of all areas of tax avoidance.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list his targets for savings in the Ministry of Defence in connection with his comprehensive spending review. [8188]

Mr. Darling: The scope of the strategic defence review was announced on 28 May. It will be integrated with our wider comprehensive spending review announced on 11 June, which is addressing priorities across all Government expenditure.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the real reduction in NHS expenditure for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99, excluding allocations from the reserve, consequential on the higher GDP deflator announced in the Budget. [8141]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 11 July 1997]:* On the basis of the inflation forecast published in the Budget, the expenditure plans set by the last Government for the NHS provided for real-terms growth across the UK of 0.8 per cent. in 1997–98 and a real-terms fall of 0.5 per cent. in 1998–99. However, the additional sums allocated to the NHS in the Budget will result in a real increase of 2¼ per cent. next year.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate, in 1995–96 prices, the change in real value of the control total for public expenditure in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 relative to the forecast in the November 1996 Budget, as a consequence of the new estimates of the GDP deflator contained in his Budget; and if he will make a statement. [9483]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 21 July 1997]:* We are keeping to the inherited control totals for 1997–98 and 1998–99 as promised in the manifesto. There have been no cuts in the cash programmes set out in the 1996 Budget.

As set out in the 1996 and the 1997 Budgets, the real values of the control total, in 1995–96 prices, for the next two years respectively are £254.8 billion and £256.6 billion; and £252.3 billion and £252.2 billion.

In his Budget announced on 2 July, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced significant real increases for key priorities in 1998–99—NHS spending of 2¼ per cent. and for current spending on UK schools of 2¾ per cent. despite the higher inflation we inherited from the previous Government. We have also provided extra resources, as we also promised, under welfare to work and the capital receipts initiative which, as we have always made clear, would be additional to the control totals.

We will meet our obligations on these key priorities, but we will not lose sight of the need to keep a firm grip on inflation through the new framework for monetary policy and a close control on how we, as a Government, spend people's money. Cash planning without automatic inflation adjustments has been a key principle of spending control for two decades. It is not right to accommodate higher inflation by automatically increasing cash plans.

Policy Reviews

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each departmental policy review presently in progress or scheduled, *(a)* a description of the purpose of the review and *(b)* its expected date of completion. [10193]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 22 July 1997]:* Below is a list of policy reviews in progress or scheduled by the Chancellor's departments:

Comprehensive review of all Government spending, covering all Departments;

To ensure that public spending decisions reflect the Government's long-term priorities and meet the country's long-term needs. The conclusions will inform public spending plans for the rest of this Parliament.

The review will take 12 months to complete and will include separate reviews of the Treasury, the revenue departments and the Office for National Statistics.

Review of the Bank of England's financial arrangements

The Bank's finances will be reviewed to ensure that they are in line with the Bank's new responsibilities and best practice of transparency and accountability.

The review is under way and will be completed as soon as possible.

Review of the North sea fiscal regime

To ensure that an appropriate share of North sea profits are being taxed while continuing to maintain a high level of oil industry interest in the future development of the UK's oil and gas reserves.

The review will be completed in time for the spring Budget.

Review of capital gains taxation

To consult industry widely on the reform of capital gains tax.

The findings of the review will be reported in the next Budget.

Review of charities taxation

To explore the options for a simpler, more coherent system of tax reliefs which is better suited to the way charities work today.

Charities will be asked to send their initial views by 1 December 1997 and these will be worked into a consultation paper for publication in spring 1998.

Review of leakage and avoidance of direct taxes

To identify situations in which significant amounts of tax are, or are at risk of, leaking from the Exchequer and to consider how the Inland Revenue approaches the defeat and deterrence of tax avoidance schemes.

An outcome of the rolling review is expected to be proposed for legislation to counter tax leakage in future Finance Bills. The first results will be available in time for a spring budget.

Review of alcohol and tobacco duties

To reduce losses to Government and industry revenue through alcohol and tobacco fraud, smuggling and cross-border shopping. The review will also look at health and law and order issues.

Trade associations and other interested parties will be consulted at an early stage and their views sought on the extent of the problem and practical ways in which it can be tackled. A report is due by the end of 1997.

Review of the venture capital trust scheme and enterprise investment scheme

To take views from interested parties on the exclusion of arrangements where a substantial part of the return to investors is guaranteed, or which are backed by property, from the venture capital trust scheme and enterprise investment scheme.

The Government will publish draft legislation on guarantee arrangements for the Finance Bill following a spring Budget and will lay regulations in Parliament on asset-backed arrangements. It is expected to be ready by autumn 1997.

Tax benefit review

To explore the scope for the tax and benefit systems to act as an incentive to move off benefit and into work.

The project is expected to last for about a year.

Review of the landfill tax

To review the operation and level of the tax.

The project is expected to be complete by January 1998.

Report to Parliament on the revenue effect of a reduced rate of VAT for energy-efficient materials and alternative options for targeted relief to help those on low incomes to save energy

Section 111 of the Finance Act 1997 commits the Treasury to report by March 1998 on the consequences to the Exchequer of a reduced rate of VAT for energy-saving materials. This review broadens the scope of that study so that it will also look at the best way of giving help where it is needed.

It is expected to be complete by the end of October 1997.

Unemployment

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the assumption in the Red Book, page 108, that unemployment will remain at 2 million until 2001–02. [8619]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 24 July 1997]:* The figures on page 108 of the Red Book illustrate the impact of changing the assumptions underlying the public finances projections. Had the long-standing convention of assuming unemployment would remain flat at recent levels been used in the November 1996 Budget, unemployment would have been projected at 2 million, adding £500 million to the public sector borrowing requirement in 1996–97, rising to £1 billion in 1999–2000. The July 1997 Budget returned to the convention of assuming flat unemployment. As set out in paragraph 4.28, unemployment was assumed constant at its recent level of 1.65 million. This assumption was approved by the National Audit Office as

"consistent with the available independent estimates".

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Public Appointments

Mr. Mike Hall: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list *(a)* the chairpersons, and *(b)* the chief executives, of (i) the Equal Opportunities Commission (North West), (ii) the East Manchester Partnership, (iii) Kirkby Stephen Economic Development, (iv) the Mersey Partnership, (v) Moss Side and Hulme Business Support, (vi) North West Partnership, (vii) Preston Partnership, (viii) Ribble Valley Partnership, (ix) Inward (North West), (x) Merseyside development corporation, (xi) Derbyshire enterprise board, (xii) Furness Enterprise, (xiii) Trafford Park development corporation, (xiv) West Cumbria development corporation, (xv) Central Manchester development corporation, (xvi) Hulme city challenge, (xvii) Bolton city challenge, (xviii) Blackburn Partnership, (xix) Wigan city challenge, (xx) Sefton city challenge, (xxi) Liverpool city challenge, (xxii) Wirral Citylands, (xxiii) St. Helens First, (xiv) Ribble Valley enterprise agency, (xxv) English Estates (North West), (xxvi) National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, (xxvii) Furness Enterprise Ltd., (xxviii) West Cumbria development agency, (xxix) English Partnerships, (xxx) CEWTEC Ltd., (xxxi) Rochdale development agency, (xxxii) Merseyside training and enterprise council and (xxxiii) Liverpool housing action trust. [10267]

Dr. David Clark: Details of appointments to the boards of executive non-departmental public bodies—such as English Partnerships, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, housing action trusts and Merseyside and Trafford Park development corporations—are freely available on the Internet, www.open.gov.uk/pau/paupoint.htm. For ease of reference, however, I have listed the names of chairmen of these bodies:

Organisation	*Chairman*
English Partnerships	Lord Walker
Liverpool housing action trust	Mrs. Paula Ridley
Merseyside development corporation	Sir Desmond Pitcher
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	David McDonnell
Trafford Park development corporation	J. W. Morgan

Information on chief executives and on membership of local public bodies is not held centrally.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Department for International Development

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on *(a)* co-operation and *(b)* joint initiatives between his Department and the Department for International Development. [10236]

Mr. Rooker: The two Departments work closely together on matters of mutual interest, including the effects of agricultural policies on developing countries. We are collaborating on a study to examine how reform of the common agricultural policy can be of benefit to developing countries.

Phenylbutazone

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will oppose any ban on the use of phenylbutazone imposed by the European Union. [11007]

Mr. Rooker: Phenylbutazone is currently being evaluated within the European Union for the purpose of fixing a maximum residue limit. If an MRL cannot be set, in principle the administration of phenylbutazone to a food-producing animal would not be permitted. However, in that event, the United Kingdom would use a procedure agreed with the European Commission—if a horse is not destined for human consumption, an MRL will not be required. Phenylbutazone could therefore continue to be authorised for use in horses in the United Kingdom. There would be a requirement that the product should be clearly marked to indicate that it cannot be used in any animal intended for human consumption.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to ensure that sheep exported from the United Kingdom are identified in such a way that they can be traced back to the farm of birth to comply with the requirements of EC directive 92/102; and if he will make a statement. [10278]

Mr. Rooker: For sheep and goats, EC directive 92/102 has been implemented by the Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1996. This legislation requires that sheep and goats going for export must have an ear tag or tattoo indicating their country of origin and a flock or herd mark either of the consignor of the sheep for export or of a previous keeper of the animal. The legislation provides for a system of identification and movement records for tracing sheep and goats. We are currently reviewing pre-export procedures for live animals.

Plant Passports

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will press the European Commission to reimburse nursery owners for the cost of alternations to the wording on plant passports since 1993. [10338]

Mr. Rooker: It is unlikely to be in the United Kingdom's interest to press for additional European Community expenditure of this kind. EC requirements on the wording of plant passports have not altered since 1993, but separate EC legislation on suppliers' documents for certain plant material was implemented in 1995. This is being applied flexibly by allowing suppliers to choose the most appropriate way of providing the information that is not already given on plant passports, in order to minimise costs.

Milk Quota

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the United Kingdom's milk quota in the last three years; and what was the United Kingdom milk consumption in the same period. [10359]

Mr. Rooker: The United Kingdom's milk quota in the three-year period starting April 1994 was about 14.2 billion litres. Our total liquid milk consumption was about 5.5 billion litres. However, taking account of processed dairy products, we were about 90 per cent. self-sufficient in butter fat.

Cattle Slaughter Scheme

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of cattle slaughtered under the over-30-months cattle slaughter scheme during 1997 were cull cows. [10161]

Mr. Rooker: Abattoir returns indicate that around 90 per cent. of animals slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme so far this year were cull animals—cull cows and bulls.

Dr. Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the savings achieved by the imposition of a maximum weight limit on cattle entering the over-30-months cattle slaughter scheme. [10162]

Mr. Rooker: The average weight of cattle entering the scheme to date has been of the order of 580 to 590 kg. On that basis, a saving of around £12 to £18 per animal could result from the imposition of the maximum weight limit. However, the actual savings that arise will depend on the weight and number of animals entering the scheme in the future.

Dr. Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations he undertook with the farming industry before imposing the recently announced price reductions and maximum weight limit under the over-30-months cattle slaughter scheme. [10163]

Mr. Rooker: My colleagues and I have had several meetings with representatives of the farming industry since 1 May. There was no specific consultation on the reduction in the compensation rate for cull cows and the introduction of a maximum weight limit before the European Commission made its proposals, which the Government supported. However, Ministers are fully aware of farmers' concerns over the state of the industry and their views on the over-30-months scheme in particular.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the reduction in public expenditure from the introduction of reduced grants for the slaughter of over-30-month-old cattle in each of the next three years; and what assessment he has made of the effect of the reduction on farmers. [10632]

Mr. Rooker: The effect of the change in the over-30-months scheme will depend on the number of animals entering the scheme and their payable weights. Gross scheme expenditure is likely to be reduced by £35 million to £40 million in a full year.

The effect on individual farmers will depend on individual circumstances, including their culling programmes and the weight of animals presented for slaughter.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those abattoirs in the Wessex region eligible to slaughter under the over-30-months scheme *(a)* on 1 May 1996, *(b)* on 1 May 1997 and *(c)* at present. [11055]

Mr. Rooker: The information requested is as follows:

Date	*Abattoir*
1 May 1996	Southern Counties Fresh Foods, Langport
1 May 1997	Southern Counties, Fresh Foods, Langport Bridgewater Beef, Taunton S. J. Norman and Son, Bridport Wholesale Meat Traders, Bath
Present	Bridgewater Beef, Taunton S. J. Norman and Son, Bridport Alec Jarrett, Bristol

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the consultations which he carried out prior to his decision to limit the level of vitamin B6 in dietary supplements; when he expects to complete the consultations currently under way; when he expects to consult other EU members on his proposals; and if he will invite the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment to review the evidence which led to his decision, with particular reference to research which produced different results to that on which his decision was based. [10631]

Mr. Rooker: The Government's decision to limit the level of vitamin B6 in dietary supplements sold under food law was based on advice from two independent committees, the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment—COT—and the Food Advisory Committee. In formulating this advice, the committees took account of information supplied and views expressed by organisations with an interest in the subject matter. The organisations were invited to submit data on the safety of vitamin B6 to the COT which were considered before the committee finalised its advice. Their views on the possibility of a voluntary limit of 10 mg of vitamin B6 per daily dose were sought by officials from this Department as part of the FAC's consideration.

The Government were aware of the views that had been expressed by interested organisations when we considered the advice of the FAC. Our decision to accept that advice was announced on 4 July. On 23 July, my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health and I met representatives of organisations who were unhappy with the proposed limit to listen to their concerns. I have also written to the National Consumer Council, the Consumers Association and the National Food Alliance, none of which had expressed reservations about the decision, to give them the opportunity to comment.

Further consultation with interested parties will take place once the regulations required to implement the proposed limit have been drafted. The European Commission and other member states of the European Union will be given an opportunity to comment on the proposed regulations at the same time.

The COT has already considered this issue twice: I have no plans to invite it to undertake a further review.

Genetically Modified Food

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the circumstances in which individual EU states are permitted to prohibit the importation of genetically modified food. [10969]

Mr. Rooker: Article 12 of EC regulation 258/97 concerning novel foods and novel food ingredients provides that member states may restrict or suspend the trade of such foods—those containing, consisting of, or produced from, genetically modified organisms—within its territory, where, as a result of new information or a reassessment of existing information, that state has detailed grounds for considering that the use of such food endangers human health or the environment. There are similar provisions in article 16 of EC directive 90/220 on the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms.

Scientific Committee for Food

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations his Department has made to the European Commission regarding the declaration of interests of members of the Scientific Committee for Food. [10977]

Mr. Rooker: There is already a requirement for members of the European Commission's Scientific Committee for Food to declare interests, direct or indirect, on all items on their agendas.

Common Agricultural Policy

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of total EU expenditure has been accounted for by the CAP in each year since 1979. [10964]

Mr. Rooker: The information is as follows:

Year	*Total CAP expenditure (EAGGF guarantee) as a percentage of total EC expenditure*
1979	73
1980	69
1981	62
1982	61
1983	65
1984	67
1985	70
1986	65
1987	65
1988	67
1989	63
1990	62
1991	59
1992	55
1993	55
1994	55
1995	52

Note:

1996 figures are not yet available.

Sources:

FEOGA Annual Financial Reports.

Annual Reports of the European Court of Auditors.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money has been saved within the CAP as a result of changes negotiated during the 1992 CAP negotiations. [10965]

Mr. Rooker: The 1992 reforms resulted in a shift from end-price support to direct payments to farmers. This benefited consumers, but there were no savings to the EU budget.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Faber: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish the Government's recommendations concerning badgers and the spread of bovine tuberculosis. [11056]

Mr. Rooker: After Professor Krebs has reported later this year.

Food Sample Testing

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the rate of food sample testing in each year since 1992. [10974]

Mr. Rooker: In 1993, around 130,000 food chemical analyses were carried out by the Department. Approximately 142,800 analyses were carried out in 1994 and in excess of an estimated 145,000 in 1995 and 1996. Comparable data are not available for 1992.

BSE Carcases

Mr. Pike: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what representations he has received from *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* other bodies regarding landfill sites in which BSE carcases have been disposed of since 1988; and if he will make a statement; [9180]

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* the Environment Agency with reference to (i) leachate and (ii) other problems in relation

to landfill sites in which BSE carcases have been disposed of since 1988; what plans he has to conduct further checks on all sites; and if he will make a statement. [9181]

Mr. Rooker: This Department has received a number of letters, including from local authorities, about the licensed landfill sites in which the carcases of cattle suspected of being affected with BSE—heads previously removed for diagnosis and subsequent incineration—were disposed of between 1988 and 1991. No BSE suspects have been disposed of by landfilling since 1991 when sufficient carcase incineration capacity came on stream to process the number of cases that were coming forward.

The Environment Agency has responsibility for the supervision of landfill sites in England and Wales which are licensed under part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The objective of the licensing system is to ensure that waste is disposed of without harming the environment or human health. In fulfilment of its supervisory role, the Environment Agency has carried out a qualitative assessment of all the landfill sites that took BSE suspects, taking into account the number of carcases buried, the degree of containment and the proximity of water sources. On the basis of those findings, it then carried out a further, more detailed quantitative assessment of a selection of sites which were judged to be typical of those sites judged to be most vulnerable.

The study calculations show that the likelihood of the most exposed individual ingesting, in one year, sufficient material to cause infection as a result of the landfilling that took place ranges from one in 1 million years to one in 10,000 million years, depending on local circumstances. In reality, however, the risk to the general public in each case will be well below the level of risk to the most exposed person. The agency believes that the risks assessed for the six sites studied in the quantitative assessments should be representative of the full range of risks posed by all 59 sites. A list of these was sent to each of the relevant Members of Parliament.

The results of the Environment Agency's landfill risk assessment were published by the agency at a press conference on 25 June. Copies of this, and related risk assessments, are available in the Library of the House.

Departmental Relocation

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the capital cost will be of moving his offices to Nobel house, Millbank; and what the additional revenue costs will be to his Department, including the costs of rehousing the civil servants he displaces. [10134]

Mr. Morley: The estimated cost of moving offices to Nobel house, which is within the MAFF estate, is £120,000. The additional estimated revenue costs to the Ministry, including the costs of rehousing civil servants, is £947,000. This includes an occupancy charge of £367,000 for additional accommodation which is payable to the Property Advisers to the Civil Estate, an executive agency of the Cabinet Office. Expenditure of this order would have been incurred anyway within the next few years when the Ministry renovated its Whitehall place offices, and is therefore not additional, taking a medium-term view.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make representations to other EU countries urging them to persuade eastern European countries to end the export of live animals to the EU; and if he will make a statement. [10295]

Mr. Morley: The Government have declared our strong preference for exports of meat to take place on the hook rather than on the hoof, and we shall seek to convince our EU partners that the European Union should pursue this principle.

Rams' Horns

Mr. Reed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the British Stickmakers Guild about the classification of rams' horns as animal offal; and if he will make a statement. [10556]

Mr. Rooker: I have received no written representations from the British Stickmakers Guild about the classification of rams' horns as animal offal.

Under the Heads of Sheep and Goats Order 1996, the heads—excluding the tongue—of sheep and goats of any age other than those born, reared and slaughtered in Australia and New Zealand must be disposed of as specified waste material. This would include the horns if still attached to the head. However, horns themselves are not considered to be a risk, provided that they are removed without breaking into the cranial cavity in order to ensure that there is no risk of contamination with brain material.

Land Use

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what public funding was allocated to schemes to promote more sensitive use and maintenance of agricultural land, before May. [10986]

Mr. Morley: Details of recent and planned future departmental expenditure on agri-environment and woodland schemes[1] are contained in the table.

£000

	Actual	*Provisional outturn*	*Estimate*	*Provision*	
	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Payments to farmers	38,477	50,193	63,007	74,152	89,418
Departmental running costs	2,631	3,932	4,593	4,849	4,980
Payments to FRCA	7,206	9,616	9,389	9,820	9,820
Monitoring and other support costs	4,670	3,319	2,988	2,162	2,027
Total	52,984	67,060	79,977	90,983	106,245

[1] Environmentally sensitive areas scheme, countryside stewardship scheme from 1996–97, nitrate sensitive areas scheme, habitat scheme, organic aid scheme, moorland scheme, countryside access scheme, farm woodland scheme and farm woodland premium scheme.

Farm Incomes

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what percentage total real income from farming changed between May 1979 and April 1997. [10978]

Mr. Morley: Total income from farming in the United Kingdom is not yet known for 1997. However, in 1996 it was 25 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1979.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications were received for the countryside stewardship scheme; and how many were successful in the last year for which figures are available; and how many of those applications are still outstanding. [11335]

Mr. Morley: A total of 2,099 applications were received for the countryside stewardship scheme in 1997, the closing date for which was 31 May. In 1996, 1,115 applicants accepted agreement offers. In addition, there are still 19 offers outstanding due to continuing negotiation on the details of the agreements.

CABINET OFFICE

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what proportion of the cost of his recent visit to France was met out of *(a)* public and *(b)* Labour party funds. [10773]

Mr. Mandelson: The costs were met out of public funds.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will list each journey he has undertaken at public expense since 2 May. [10778]

Mr. Mandelson: I have travelled at public expense wherever this has been necessary to the fulfilment of my ministerial responsibilities.

Ministerial Duties

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will estimate the percentage of his working time since 2 May spent on *(a)* ministerial duties and *(b)* other matters. [10772]

Mr. Mandelson: I devote whatever time I judge necessary to the fulfilment of my ministerial and other duties.

British Council Speech

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will place in the Library a copy of his speech to the British Council in Paris on 17 July. [10777]

Mr. Mandelson: I spoke extempore, to a seminar arranged by the British Council.

Millennium Experience

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will list *(a)* the contracts let so far and *(b)* those proposed to be let in the next two years in connection with the millennium experience. [6442]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company has entered into a range of contracts for the supply of goods and services, including those for steelwork and fabric for the construction of the dome to a value in excess of £20 million and into a number of other performance and target-led contracts. The NMEC expects to commit the majority of its expenditure within the next two years. All contracts will be subject to normal *Official Journal of the European Communities* procedures. The NMEC will publish full accounts of its expenditure in the usual way in due course.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Defence Exports

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with Britain's defence industrial partners about his proposed policy for defence exports. [10643]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have discussed with several of our partners at ministerial and official level our commitment to work for an EU code of conduct setting high common standards to govern arms exports from all EU member states. We shall be reinforcing these initial contacts in the weeks and months to come with a view to agreeing a code during the UK presidency.

We have also been working to strengthen the UN register of conventional arms, encouraging greater disclosure of information on arms exports and arms transfers by all countries.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his interim policy on the licensing of defence exports pending the completion of the review of licensing policy. [10640]

Mr. Lloyd: During the review of the criteria used in considering licence applications for the export of conventional arms, individual export licence applications have been considered on a case-by-case basis. Officials have been instructed to consult Ministers whenever export licence applications may cause concerns about human rights or international stability.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has today announced the results of the review in his written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms).

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria will be used in considering licence applications for the export of conventional arms; and if he will make a statement. [11461]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Government are committed to the maintenance of a strong defence industry which is a strategic part of our industrial base as well as of our defence effort. Defence exports can also contribute to international stability by strengthening bilateral and collective defence relationships in accordance with the right of self-defence recognised by the UN charter, but arms transfers must be managed responsibly, in particular so as to avoid their use for internal repression and international aggression.

It will be important to avoid a situation in which our policy of seeking to prevent certain regimes from acquiring certain equipment is undermined by foreign competitors supplying them. We will therefore work for the introduction of a European code of conduct, setting high common standards to govern arms exports from all EU member states.

Licences to export strategic goods are issued by the President of the Board of Trade and the export control organisation of the Department of Trade and Industry is the licensing authority. All relevant individual licence applications are circulated by the DTI to other Government Departments with an interest, as determined by them in line with their policy responsibilities. These include the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development.

The present Government were not responsible for the decisions on export licences made by the previous Administration. We do not, however, consider that it would be realistic or practical to revoke licences that were valid and in force at the time of our election.

The criteria set out below will be used when considering all future individual applications for licences to export goods entered in part III of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 and existing licence applications on which a decision has not yet been made. The criteria will also be applied when considering advance approvals for promotion prior to formal application for an export licence and licence applications for the export of dual-use goods when there are grounds for believing that the end user of such goods will be the armed forces or the internal security forces of the recipient country.

The criteria will constitute broad guidance. They will not be applied mechanistically and judgment will always be required. Individual applications will be considered case by case.

Criteria used in considering conventional arms export licence applications

1. An export licence will not be issued if the arguments for doing so are outweighed by the need to comply with the UK's international obligations and commitments, or by concern that the goods might be used for internal repression or international aggression, or by the risks to regional stability, or other considerations as described in these criteria.

The United Kingdom's international obligations

2. An export licence should be refused if approval would be inconsistent with:

(a) the UK's international obligations and commitments to enforce United Nations, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and European Union arms embargoes, together with any national embargoes or other commitments regarding the application of strategic export controls;

(b) the UK's international obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, the biological weapons convention and the chemical weapons convention;

(c) the UK's commitments to the international export control regimes—the Australia group, the missile technology control regime, the nuclear suppliers group and the Wassenaar arrangement;

(d) the EU common criteria for arms exports, the guidelines for conventional arms transfers agreed by the permanent five members of the UN Security Council, and the OSCE principles governing conventional arms transfers;

(e) the UK's commitment not to export all forms of anti-personnel land mines and their components.

The United Kingdom's national interests

3. Full weight should be given to the UK's national interests when considering applications for licences, including:

(a) the potential effect on the UK's defence and security interests and those of allies and EU partners;

(b) the potential effect on the UK's economic, financial and commercial interests, including our long-term interests in having stable, democratic trading partners;

(c) the potential effect on the UK's relations with the recipient country;

(d) the potential effect on any collaborative defence production or procurement project with allies or EU partners;

(e) the protection of the UK's essential strategic industrial base.

Human rights and internal repression

4. The Government:

(a) will take into account respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the recipient country;

(b) will not issue an export licence if there is a clearly identifiable risk that the proposed export might be used for internal repression.

5. For these purposes equipment which might be used for internal repression will include:

(a) Equipment where there is clear evidence of the recent use of similar equipment for internal repression by the proposed end user, or where there is reason to believe that the equipment will be diverted from its stated end use or end user and used for internal repression;

(b) Equipment which has obvious application for internal repression, in cases where the recipient country has a significant and continuing record of such repression, unless the end use of the equipment is judged to be legitimate, such as protection of members of security forces from violence.

6. The nature of the equipment proposed for export will also be carefully considered. Certain goods have more obvious potential for use in internal repression than others, such as armoured personnel carriers specifically designed for internal security. In other cases, there may be prima facie reasons for believing that a particular equipment might be used in such roles in certain circumstances. Any proposed export which is to be used by the recipient country for internal security purposes should be considered particularly carefully.

7. Internal repression includes extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrest, torture, suppression or major violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In some cases, the use of force by a Government within their own borders does not constitute internal repression. The use of such force by Governments is legitimate in some cases, for example to preserve law and order against terrorists or other criminals. However, force may be used only in accordance with international human rights standards.

International Aggression

8. The Government will not issue an export licence if there is a clearly identifiable risk that the intended recipient would use the proposed export aggressively against another country, or to assert by force a territorial claim. However, a purely theoretical possibility that the items concerned might be used in the future against another state will not of itself lead to a licence being refused.

9. When considering the risk that the country for which arms are destined might use them for international aggression, the Government will take into account:

(a) the existence or likelihood of armed conflict between the recipient and another country;

(b) a claim against the territory of a neighbouring country which the recipient has in the past tried or threatened to pursue by means of force;

(c) whether the equipment wold be likely to be used other than for the legitimate national security and defence of the recipient.

Regional stability

10. The need not to affect adversely regional stability in any significant way will also be considered. The balance of forces between neighbouring states, their relative expenditure on defence, and the need not to introduce into the region new capabilities which would be likely to lead to increased tension, will all be taken into account.

Other criteria

11. In assessing the impact of the proposed export on the importing country and the risk that exported goods might be diverted to an undesirable end user, the following will be considered:

(a) the legitimate defence and domestic security interests of the recipient country, including any involvement in UN or other peacekeeping activity;

(b) the technical capability of the recipient country to use the equipment;

(c) whether the purchase would seriously undermine the economy of the recipient country, taking into account its public finances, balance of payments, external debt, economic and social development and any International Monetary Fund/World bank-sponsored economic reform programme;

(d) the risk of the arms being re-exported or diverted to an undesirable end user, including terrorist organisations—anti-terrorist equipment would need particularly careful consideration in this context.

12. The following factors will also be taken into account:

(a) the risk of use of the goods concerned against UK forces;

(b) the need to protect UK military classified information and capabilities;

(c) the potential for the equipment to be a force multiplier in the region;

(d) the risk of reverse engineering or technology transfer.

13. In the application of all the above criteria, account should also be taken of, for example, reporting from diplomatic posts, relevant reports by international bodies, intelligence, and information from open sources and non-governmental organisations.

REPORTING TO PARLIAMENT

To ensure full transparency and accountability to Parliament, the Government will report annually on the state of strategic export controls and their application, thereby providing for parliamentary consideration of the application of the criteria. The Government will also inform Parliament of any changes to the criteria.

Baltic Action Plan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the British Government have been consulted on the US Administration's proposal for the Baltic action plan. [10441]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The USA is discussing with the Baltic states the possible conclusion of a charter as part of a process further to develop co-operation between the USA and the Baltic states. This is a matter between the USA and the Baltic states. We have, however, been kept informed of progress in these talks.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the impact of the provisions of the Baltic action plan currently being negotiated on British commitments towards the Baltic states. [10442]

Mr. Henderson: The USA is discussing with the Baltic states the possible conclusion of a charter as part of a process further to develop co-operation between the USA and the Baltic states. The charter will not affect British relations with the Baltic states.

NATO Enlargement

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Government's objectives for the first meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation-Russia permanent joint council on 22 September. [10443]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's objective at the first ministerial meeting of the permanent joint council will be to consult the Russian Foreign Minister on a range of security issues of common interest and to begin to establish a new mechanism for building greater trust and co-operation between Russia and NATO. The first meeting is expected in September; no date has been confirmed.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the potential impact of NATO enlargement on the future of arms control with special reference to START 2, START 3—the strategic arms reduction talks—and the conventional forces in Europe treaty. [10444]

Mr. Lloyd: START 2 and START 3 remain bilateral US–Russian negotiations to which President Clinton and President Yeltsin recommitted themselves in March this year in the run-up to the NATO summit and the announcements made there about NATO enlargement. I welcome their continued commitment to progress.

The CFE treaty is being adapted by all 30 state parties. On 23 July, after the NATO summit and enlargement decisions, agreement was reached on the basic elements of an adapted treaty. This was a very welcome sign of progress.

Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the negotiations in Vienna on adapting and modernising the CFE treaty. [10445]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: On 23 July, NATO allies and the other 14 CFE states adopted an outline agreement for modernising the CFE treaty. This is good news for European security. CFE states have agreed to abolish the old bloc-to-bloc structure of the treaty and to set lower maximum equipment levels; maintain regional limits, including in the flank zone of south-east and north-east Europe; improve the transparency of our military activity, including the exacting inspections which have been one of the treaty's greatest strengths.

Negotiations will resume in Vienna in September on the basis of this outline agreement.

Regional or Minority Language Charter

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to ratify the Council of Europe's charter for regional or minority languages; and if he will make a statement. [10372]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are currently examining what the implications of signing and ratifying the charter would be. Once this examination is complete, we will be in a better position to take a decision on the matter.

Strategic Defence Review

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, column *519*, what is the closing date for representations to be made under stage 1 of the strategic defence review. [10837]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The closing date for written comments on all stages of the strategic defence review was 30 June 1997.

Bermuda

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what responsibilities he has *(a)* generally for electoral arrangements and *(b)* for setting the terms of reference of commissioners determining constituency boundaries in Bermuda. [10821]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has ultimate responsibility for electoral arrangements in Bermuda which are determined by the relevant provisions of the Bermudian constitution. However, questions on electoral boundaries would in the first instance be matters for the Bermuda Government.

Copyright

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures his Department is taking to ensure compliance with copyright law; and what progress it is making towards taking out a photocopying licence with the Copyright Licensing Agency. [10992]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: This Department takes its responsibilities under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 seriously and is already party to the Central Office of Information agreement with the Newspapers Licensing Agency in respect of systematic copying of newspapers.

The copying of Crown copyright material is not a matter for licensing for use by Crown servants.

Representatives of the Copyright Licensing Agency and this Department most recently met on 30 April 1997 and we are assessing the position in respect of non-newspaper copying in the light of that meeting.

An agreement with the CLA is not necessarily required in order to comply with UK copyright legislation.

Slovenia

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current position with regard to the United Kingdom ratifying the Europe agreement with Slovenia; and if he will make a statement. [10792]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The UK is strongly committed to early and successful enlargement of the European Union. An important aspect of the preparation for this is the ratification of the Europe agreements. We are determined to ensure that the UK ratifies the EU–Slovenia Europe agreement as soon as possible. Subject to the availability of the necessary parliamentary time, we expect to complete our parliamentary procedures within the next four months.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Staff

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of staff normally working at *(a)* Dover house, *(b)* St. Andrew's house and *(c)* Leith. [10167]

Mr. Dewar: The number of permanent staff working at Dover house, St. Andrew's house and Victoria quay, Leith are shown in the table. Figures relate to the position at 1 April 1997 and are a head count of full-time and part-time staff, rounded to the nearest 10.

Building	*Headcount*
Dover house	30
St. Andrew's house	410
Victoria quay, Leith	1,160

The number of staff currently working in St. Andrew's house is low at present and is normally around the 800 level. Due to refurbishment work, however, many have been decanted temporarily to other buildings, other than Victoria quay. In addition, there are approximately 60 contracted staff for facilities management who work in Victoria quay.

Referendum

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if each group campaigning in the referendum will be permitted a free delivery of a leaflet to *(a)* each elector entitled to vote in the forthcoming referendum or *(b)* each household in Scotland. [10073]

Mr. McLeish: The Government have made it clear during the debates on the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill that no state aid will be provided to any party or organisation for the purposes of campaigning at the referendum.

Further Education

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the proposed timetable for the review of further education in Scotland. [10173]

Mr. Wilson: The review of further education colleges' funding methodology, currently under way, is expected to be completed in September.

Juveniles

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of prostitution have been recorded among juveniles in detention in the past year. [9258]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 23 July 1997]:* In the past year, no cases of prostitution have been recorded among children in secure accommodation. No cases of prostitution have been recorded by the Scottish Prison Service among young prisoners under 16 during the same period.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many incidents of *(a)* protest movements, *(b)* mutinies or rebellions, *(c)* hunger strikes, *(d)* cases of self-mutilation, *(e)* cases of suicide and *(f)* prison escapes or attempted escapes affecting (i) male and (ii) female juveniles in detention have been recorded in the past year. [9286]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 23 July 1997]:* There were no such incidents involving young prisoners under 16 recorded by the Scottish Prison Service in the past year. In secure accommodation for children, there were no cases of protest movements, mutinies, rebellions or hunger strikes. Three cases of self-mutilation and two attempted suicides were recorded. There were four attempted escapes—four boys and two girls—and three boys escaped.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the incidence of physical and sexual abuse by inmates in respect of juveniles in detention in the last year. [9259]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 23 July 1997]:* There was no evidence of such abuse of young prisoners under 16 recorded by the Scottish Prison Service in the past year. Two incidents of physical abuse and one incident of sexual abuse by inmates were recorded among children in secure accommodation.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many complaints have been made alleging ill-treatment of juveniles in detention; and if he will make a statement on the outcomes of these complaints. [9261]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 23 July 1997]:* There have been no complaints recorded by the Scottish Prison Service alleging ill-treatment of young prisoners under 16. Fourteen complaints alleging ill-treatment in secure accommodation for children are recorded. Of these, two were withdrawn, 10 were investigated and not upheld and two are under investigation.

Retail Petrol Industry

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when his Department will complete its study into the retail petrol industry. [10528]

Mr. Chisholm *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* The study is about rural petrol stations, the contribution they make to the local community and security of petrol supplies in rural parts of Scotland in the future. It began in February 1997 and is expected to be complete in late spring 1998.

Legal Aid (Fees)

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when legal aid fees for advice and assistance were last set; what the hourly rate is; and what the hourly rate would currently be if it had been uprated in line with *(a)* inflation and *(b)* increases in average professional civil service pay rates. [10164]

Mr. McLeish: Most of the rates for advice and assistance were last set in April 1992. The present hourly rate for a solicitor is £42.20. If this had been increased in line with the gross domestic product deflator to April 1997, the rate would be £48.49. If it had been increased in line with average professional civil service pay rates, the rate would be £48.06.

Millennium Funding

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has made to the *(a)* Prime Minister, *(b)* the Minister without Portfolio and *(c)* the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport concerning the redistribution of millennium funding away from projects in Scotland. [10373]

Mr. Galbraith: The assessment of applications for millennium funding and the distribution of grants are matters for the Millennium Commission. To date, the commission has allocated a higher percentage of its grants to Scotland than would be allocated on a per capita basis.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Roads Review

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about the roads review. [11286]

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to make an announcement on the outcome of the accelerated roads review. [10665]

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of the A36 road improvement between Codford and Heytesbury. [11057]

Dr. Strang: I am today launching a public consultation on the roads review. This seeks views on the role which the trunk road network should play in our integrated transport strategy. Our general approach is to look at the transport problems which lie behind proposals for roads schemes and then to seek solutions which are environmentally sustainable. We invite comments on how we should respond to increasing congestion. We intend to bring a fresh approach to the process of making decisions on the roads programme. We will take a more strategic view and judge proposals on the criteria of accessibility, safety, economy, the environment and integration—which we are adding to the four manifesto criteria as it is fundamental to our whole approach to transport policy.

A further key aspect is the development of an investment strategy for the trunk road network. The consultation invites contributions to this process. Other issues raised include where responsibility should lie for the trunk roads; how trunk roads investment should be planned in the future as part of strengthened arrangements for co-ordinating the planning of land use, economic development and transport at the regional level; and funding of the trunk road system. The Government remain committed to seeking ways for the private sector to contribute to the provision of transport infrastructure including, where appropriate, road construction and maintenance projects. The review will consider the possibilities.

Copies of the consultative document "What Role for Trunk Roads in England?" are being sent to interested parties and placed in the Library of the House. It is also available from my Department and on the Internet.

I am also today announcing the results of our accelerated review of 12 urgent cases. They have all been assessed against the criteria of integration, accessibility, safety, economy and environmental impact. We have concluded:

The environmental disbenefits including, in particular, the impact on a sensitive landscape, of the proposed Salisbury bypass outweigh the benefits to through traffic and to Salisbury and the villages bypassed. The scheme has therefore been cancelled. A study will consider alternative solutions to the area's traffic problems. The remaining schemes in the former Wessex link project will be considered on their merits in the main review.

The inspector's recommendations on the Birmingham northern relief road should be accepted and the scheme approved. This is a nationally strategic route of the first importance. The capacity of the M6 at this point cannot be increased. The BNRR also opens up opportunities for more integrated road–rail freight links. The full reasons for this decision are set out in the decision letter, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. It is now up to the concessionaire to show what the private sector can do and deliver this vital project quickly.

The A13 Thames gateway schemes will be taken forward. These will provide the transport infrastructure needed for regeneration of east London and docklands. They will help improve accessibility to areas of east London including the Royal docks and the lower Lea valley where key development sites are capable of generating significant job opportunities.

The M66 Denton Middleton contract 3 and the A564 Derby southern bypass contract B will go ahead. Both are final links necessary to unlock the full benefits of much larger projects. The M66 scheme is the final six-mile section of the strategic Manchester motorway box. The Derby southern bypass is similarly the final section in a strategic east–west route.

We will honour the commitment given by the previous Government to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill Committee to use all reasonable endeavours to see that the M2-A2 widening works are completed within the period of the construction of the CTRL and that the construction arrangements of the two projects are co-ordinated to minimise disruption to the public. This scheme will facilitate integrated road and rail investment and services, for example by encouraging full use of Ebbsfleet station on the CTRL.

The M62-M606 link roads will be considered further in the main review. An early decision is not required on transport grounds.

The A40 scheme in the west of London would have the effect of encouraging car commuting where public transport alternatives exist. This would not be justified and the scheme will therefore be cancelled. Alternative solutions to local problems will be sought.

Having reviewed the Cumbria–Bradford, south midlands and Weald and Downland projects on transport grounds against our criteria, we have concluded that the individual schemes in these projects do not merit priority over many similar schemes which are to be considered in the main review. The schemes which made up these projects will be considered in the main review.

We will continue to consider in detail whether the M25 should be widened between junctions 12 and 15 as proposed as a controlled motorway, with appropriate traffic management measures, complemented by other transport strategies.

Freight Train Derailment, Bexley

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he plans to take in response to the findings on the cause of the freight train derailment at Bexley on 4 February. [10563]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Health and Safety Executive's independent technical investigation into the cause of the derailment at Bexley on 4 February is continuing and its findings will be made public in due course. Until HSE has completed its inquiries, it would be premature to speculate as to the cause. In the meantime, should HSE through its inquiries become aware of any safety-related issues that it considers should be disseminated to relevant parts of the railway industry, it will not hesitate to do so.

Speed Limits

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to relax departmental controls on highway authorities to permit the introduction of 20 mph limits outside schools without reference to his Department. [10450]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are considering at present whether to relax the current requirement for the consent of the Secretary of State to reduce speed limits below 30 mph.

Heathrow Airport (Terminal 5)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 June, *Official Report*, column 57, what are the terms of reference for the public inquiry into the application for a fifth terminal at Heathrow, with special reference to arrangements for surface access. [10645]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The terms of reference are set out in the Secretary of State for the Environment's call-in letter of 15 March 1993 to the director of planning, London borough of Hillingdon, a copy of which is being placed in the Library of the House. With regard to surface access, these ask the inspector to consider:

> "the relationship of the proposals to the Department's Regional Strategic Guidance for the South East and the Strategic Guidance for London (RPG3);

and

> "the implications of the development for: *(a)* road traffic and public transport, and *(b)* public safety".

Section 6.45 of RPG3, May 1996, states:

> "Boroughs should . . . develop with airport operators, public transport operators, car parking operators and others a common approach to, and strategies to deal with, the surface access implications of existing and planned growth at airports, in order to promote public transport and reduce car use."

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the extent of air pollution caused by emissions from buses; and what plans he has to restrict such emissions. [10877]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The contribution of bus exhaust emissions to air pollution is estimated as follows:

(1995 figures)	*Volatile organic compounds*	*Oxides of nitrogen*	*Carbon monoxide*	*Sulphur dioxide*	*Black smoke*
Emissions in kilotonnes	15	68	66	4	19.7
Percentage of UK total	0.6	3.0	1.2	0.2	5.5
Percentage of road transport	3	6	2	8	11.1
Percentage of diesel emissions	21	16	34	12	12.1

More stringent emission standards for new and existing buses together with improvements in fuel quality should bring significant improvements in bus emissions. Further improvements in the quality of diesel fuel from 2000 were recently agreed by the Government with their European partners with yet further improvements anticipated from 2005. These measures will further reduce exhaust emissions from all buses. In addition, even tighter emission standards for new buses to apply from 2000 will be prescribed under EU proposals which are expected to be published shortly. Meanwhile, the Chancellor has announced his intention of extending to buses the vehicle excise duty incentive scheme for vehicles that meet more stringent emission requirements.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Government plan to publish type approval data showing the levels of toxic emissions for new cars sold in the United Kingdom. [10302]

Ms Jackson: Data on emissions from different models of passenger cars in connection with MOT test standards are already publicly available. There are some practical problems about making type approval data available in a useful form, not least because many type approvals are done in other EU countries, and the information is therefore complicated and expensive to collate. But we accept the principle of publishing this data and have asked officials to see how this can be achieved.

Lorry Drivers (Eyesight)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in how many road accidents the primary cause was recorded as lorry drivers' glasses falling off for each of the last five years. [10361]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This information is not available. The police and local authorities investigate causes of accidents, and we are looking at ways of incorporating information about causation in the road accident statistics collected by the Department. It is unlikely, however, that the information could be broken down into this level of detail.

Road Haulage Industry

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the impact of European Union directive 91/439 on the United Kingdom road haulage industry. [10362]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Directive 91/439, most of whose provisions came into force in the UK on 1 January 1997, introduced a requirement for indefinite mutual recognition of driving licences by member states, based on a common licence format and common testing and health standards throughout the European Union. The main changes affecting the driving of goods vehicles are:

staged testing, requiring drivers to pass a test on a rigid goods vehicle before they may progress to a test for goods vehicles with trailers;

a new driving test, and higher medical standards, for driving goods vehicles between 3.5 and 7.5 tonnes—an entitlement granted with a car licence before 1997;

a reduction in the size of trailer that may be towed by drivers who passed a large goods vehicle—over 7.5 tonnes—test on a rigid vehicle before 1997;

more stringent eyesight standards for new applicants for large goods vehicle licences.

The costs of any additional training and testing required by these changes will in many cases be borne by new drivers who first obtain a goods vehicle licence on or after 1 January 1997 before they take up employment in the road haulage industry. But some costs are involved for the industry, particularly where employers meet the expense of additional qualifications required by their existing work-force. In the longer term, we would expect the new requirements to lead to better trained and qualified drivers, which will benefit the industry, as well as bringing more general road safety benefits.

Fishing Vessels (Safety)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the representations made to the Marine Safety Agency concerning the code of safe practice for registered fishing vessels less than 12 m in length. [10389]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Desmond Swayne, dated 28 July 1997:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked me to reply to your Question about publishing the representations made with regard to the "Code of Safe Practice for Registered Fishing Vessels Less Than 12 Metres Length".

Following the end of the consultation period, it is intended that a summary of all the comments received on the draft Code will be prepared.

La Hague Nuclear Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what United Kingdom-French agreements govern the discharge of radioactive material from the La Hague nuclear reprocessing plant; and what notification the Channel Islands authorities received of such agreements. [10425]

Angela Eagle: There is no United Kingdom-France bilateral agreement governing the discharge radioactivity, although such an agreement concerning exchange of information in the event of accidental releases of radioactivity does exist.

The UK and France are, however, both signatories to various international conventions and treaties, and are active participants in the work of the many international organisations concerned with radioactivity. Most important is the Euratom treaty under which both the United Kingdom and France are legally bound to adhere to standards of protection from radiation, and to the provision of information on transboundary effects of radioactive waste disposal, including discharges from the La Hague nuclear reprocessing plant. The Channel Islands authorities are aware of these arrangements.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what information at the time of the 1989 application for radioactive discharges from the La Hague nuclear reprocessing plant in France was made available to the United Kingdom regarding *(a)* detectable levels of radioactivity in the English channel and *(b)* studies made by the French authorities on the transport of radioactive materials from the discharge pipe. [10424]

Angela Eagle: As regulation of nuclear installations is a matter for national authorities, France was not required to, nor did it, supply the United Kingdom Government with information concerning the 1989 developments at La Hague. However, under article 37 of the Euratom treaty, member states are required to supply general data to the European Commission relating to any plan for the disposal of radioactive waste, including discharges, in whatever form as will make it possible to determine whether the implementation of such plan is liable to result in the contamination of the water, soil or air space of another member state. Data concerning the plan for disposal of waste from the UP3 and the UP2-800 reprocessing plants at La Hague were provided by the French authorities to the Commission on 1 March 1989. United Kingdom experts assisted the Commission in its evaluation. The Commission opinion, that no contamination significant from the point of view of health would result, was published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* dated 10 August 1989, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Rape Seed Oil

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of his Department's trials of oil seed rape for fuel with particular reference to the potential environmental benefits. [10490]

Angela Eagle: The former Department of Transport co-funded a study with the Department of Trade and Industry which resulted in a report entitled "Alternative Road Transport Fuels—A Preliminary Life-cycle Study for the UK". This report, which was published in March 1996, contains a chapter on biodiesel, which is another term for rape methyl ester produced from rape seed oil. The report states:

> "there is no conclusive evidence of the environmental benefits biodiesel may bring, except for reduced sulphur emissions compared with mineral diesel".

My Department is currently sponsoring comparative trials of both cleaner conventional fuels and alternative fuels, including natural gas, liquefied petroleum gas and rape methyl ester produced from rape seed oil. The trials will provide a further indication of the emissions reduction potential of rape methyl ester and of the practicability, reliability and driveability of vehicles that use this fuel. The results of the trials will be published later this year.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 July, *Official Report*, column *124*, if fuel made from rape seed oil is included in the trials of city diesel. [10489]

Angela Eagle: The comparative trials of alternative fuels which my Department is currently sponsoring include trials of vehicles fuelled with rape methyl ester which is manufactured from rape seed oil. The results of the trials will be published later this year.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the commercial non-food uses of *(a)* rape seed oil and *(b)* chicory which his Department has evaluated. [10972]

Angela Eagle: I am aware of only one non-food use of rape seed oil which has been evaluated by my Department, and that is its use as a feedstock for the production of a fuel for road vehicles known as rape methyl ester. I am not aware of any uses of chicory which have been evaluated by my Department.

Proposed Shopping Centre, London

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the decision to grant planning approval to Sainsbury to build a shopping centre between Richmond and East Sheen. [10605]

Mr. Raynsford: The decision was made by the planning inspector. I have therefore asked the Planning Inspectorate's chief executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 25 July 1997:

> The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about the planning appeal decision to allow a food retail development and a non-food retail development on land at the former gasworks site located at Lower Richmond Road and Manor Road, Richmond.
>
> The appeal proposal was the subject of an 8 day public inquiry. After considering all the evidence, the Inspector was satisfied that the proposed development would not have an adverse effect on the vitality and viability of the existing town centres in the Borough. He also found that there were no alternative town centre or edge-of-centre sites available for the development.
>
> The Inspector considered the effect of the proposal on the road and public transport network. Again, however, he found no cogent grounds to justify withholding consent.
>
> In the absence of any substantiated planning objections to the proposals, the Inspector therefore allowed the appeals.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library copies of the risk assessments for those genetically modified organisms granted consents for *(a)* field testing and *(b)* marketing. [10950]

Angela Eagle: The risk assessments for all the applications for consents for *(a)* field testing and *(b)* marketing of genetically modified organisms are placed on the statutory public register held by the Department. It would be unnecessary duplication to place and maintain them in the Library.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list by *(a)* company and *(b)* consent the function of genetic modification in each genetically modified organism granted experimental release. [10973]

Angela Eagle: One hundred and twenty-four consents have been granted for the experimental release of genetically modified organisms since the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992 came into force. The information on granting of the consent to the company and the function of the genetic modification is on a statutory public register held by the Department.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the dates on which consents were granted for the release of genetically modified organisms for *(a)* field testing and *(b)* marketing. [10971]

Angela Eagle: For *(a)* field testing, 124 consents and for *(b)* marketing, two consents have been granted since the coming into force of the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992. All these consents and their dates of issue are on the statutory public register held by the Department.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many applications for consent to release organisms genetically modified for ampicillin resistance for the purpose of *(a)* field testing and *(b)* marketing are currently being considered by his Department. [10976]

Angela Eagle: The Department is currently considering *(a)* one application for field testing and *(b)* no applications for marketing of organisms genetically modified for ampicillin resistance in accordance with the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the members of the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment and *(b)* their declared interests. [10970]

Angela Eagle: The list of *(a)* members of the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment—ACRE—and *(b)* their declared interests are published in the ACRE annual report, which is placed in the Library.

Planning Applications

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in each of the past five years how many planning applications were referred by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* others to his Department; and how many in each category were called in. [10329]

Mr. Raynsford: Planning applications are referred to the Department in a number of ways. Many are notified to my right hon. Friend under directions made under the Town and Country Planning Acts, particularly those involving development proposals that depart from the local development plan or retail development above a certain floor space. Others may be voluntarily referred to the Department by local planning authorities. In addition, any interested individual or body may ask my right hon. Friend to call in a planning application.

Information is not available in the form requested. However, in the last five years the following numbers of applications in England were called in for decision by the Secretary of State:

Year	*Number of applications*
1992–93	101
1993–94	99
1994–95	167
1995–96	144
1996–97	139

Charity Shops

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the impact of charity shops on town centre trading. [10370]

Mr. Raynsford: No such assessment has been made in the last three years. Although we are not aware of any assessment before that, this could be ascertained definitely only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the concession on business rates available to charity shops; what plans he has to alter the rules relating to business rates in respect of charity shops; and if he will make a statement. [10371]

Mr. Raynsford: Charities are entitled to 80 per cent. rate relief on their charity shops if they are used wholly or mainly for the sale of donated goods and the net proceeds are used for charitable purposes. Local authorities may top this up to 100 per cent. if they wish. Charitable rate relief will be looked at as part of the charities taxation review announced by the Chancellor in the Budget.

British Waterways Board

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to change the external financing limit for the British Waterways Board. [10467]

Angela Eagle: The external financing limit for the British Waterways Board will be increased by £470,000 from £50,890,000 to £51,360,000. This will allow increased capital spending. The change will be made under the nationalised industries' end-year flexibility arrangements and takes account of a matching underspend against the board's 1996–97 external financing limit.

Radon

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Government have for the radon-free measurement programme; and if he will make a statement. [10468]

Angela Eagle: The Government are concerned by the threat posed to health by high concentrations of radon gas in homes and we therefore propose to complete the two-year programme, initiated by the previous Government, the second phase of which began in February this year. From early autumn, invitations for a free radon measurement will be sent to the remaining homes in England—nearly 178,000—which have a greater than 5 per cent. chance of being above the recommended radon action level and which have not already received an invitation. These invitations will ensure that every household in the most radon-affected parts of the country will have been offered a free radon measurement.

When we have the data generated by this programme, we will be able to consider, with local authorities, the best way to deal with this problem on a local basis.

Local Authority Pension Funds

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what are the dates on which the next actuarial valuations of local authority pension funds are due to be carried out; [10623]

(2) how many local authority pension funds were in *(a)* deficit and *(b)* surplus at the date of the most recent actuarial valuations; [10624]

(3) when were the most recent actuarial valuations of local authority pension funds carried out. [10622]

Ms Armstrong: I refer the hon. Member to the response that I have him on 14 July 1997, *Official Report*, column 6.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the cost to local authorities of employers' contributions made to occupational pension funds in respect of their employees in the last year for which figures are available. [10621]

Ms Armstrong: For the year ending 31 March 1996, the most recent year for which details are available, the total amount of employers' contributions made to the local government pension scheme was £1.16 billion.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many employees of local authorities are members of public sector occupational pension funds. [10629]

Ms Armstrong: There were 1.4 million members of the local government pension scheme at the end of 1995–96, the most recent year for which details are available. Figures are not available for local authority employees who may be members of other public sector occupational pension funds.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on local authorities of the changes to their tax treatment of the dividends received by occupational pension funds. [10620

Ms Armstrong: Until the results of the next actuarial valuations in England and Wales are available, it will not be possible to give a true assessment of any impact on the local government pension scheme.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many public sector occupational pension funds provide pensions for former employees of local authorities. [10628]

Ms Armstrong: There are 90 administering authorities in England and Wales that provide pensions for former members of the local government pension scheme.

Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many jobs have been created as a result of the single regeneration budget challenge fund. [10922]

Angela Eagle: A total of 22,283 jobs were created in 1995–96. Only provisional figures are available so far for 1996–97 and these indicate that some 38,700 jobs were created in that financial year.

Greater London Authority

Ms Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Government intend to publish the Green Paper setting out their proposals for a Greater London authority. [11410]

Mr. Prescott: We will publish a consultation paper on our proposals for a Greater London authority tomorrow. Copies of the Green Paper will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Homelessness

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many people were homeless in each year since 1979. [10981]

Mr. Raynsford: The numbers of households for which local authorities in England accepted responsibility to secure accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and the Housing Act 1985 in the years since 1979 were as follows:

	Numbers
1979	55,530
1980	60,400
1981	66,990
1982	71,620
1983	75,470
1984	80,500
1985	91,010
1986	100,490
1987	109,170
1988	113,770
1989	122,180
1990	140,350
1991	144,780

	Numbers
1992	142,890
1993	132,380
1994	122,460
1995	121,280
1996	116,870

Note:

The figures for the years 1979 to 1982 are not strictly comparable with those for the later years because of changes to reporting arrangements made in 1980 for non-metropolitan districts and in 1982 for London borough and metropolitan districts.

Source:

Quarterly P1(E) returns

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate has been made of the number of rough sleepers in central London in each year since 1979. [10983]

Mr. Raynsford: There are no reliable estimates for rough sleepers in central London before 1992. Those since are given in the table.

Site	*November 1996*	*May 1996*	*February 1996*	*November 1995*	*May 1995*	*November 1994*	*November 1993*	*March 1992*
Strand/West End	140	128	113	138	138	153	118	104
Victoria	44	56	33	34	41	33	33	36
Waterloo/Bullring	57	55	30	53	44	59	56	121
South Camden	45	49	29	47	47	43	69	[1]179
Total	286	288	205	272	270	288	276	440
Whitechapel and City	43	58	36	63	77	67	53	—
W1/W2	28	25	32	24	—	34	—	—

[1] South Camden total includes Embankment (now West End) and Temple (part now in Whitechapel and City) so exact comparison not possible.

When the rough sleepers initiative in central London began in 1990, voluntary agencies estimated that between 1,000 and 2,000 people were sleeping rough in central London. Monitoring arrangements for the initiative include counts of people sleeping rough, undertaken twice a year by voluntary sector homelessness agencies. The latest count for which figures are available, in November 1996, found 286 people in the central London areas covered. Information from previous counts, which began in March 1992, is as set out in the table, which also includes information on counts in Whitechapel and the City and parts of the W1-W2 postal district.

Water Quality

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of changes in the quality of river and coastal water since the privatisation of water authorities. [10987]

Angela Eagle: The Environment Agency reports a net upgrading in chemical quality of almost 28 per cent. of total monitored length of rivers and canals in England and Wales between 1990 and 1995 and an upgrading in biological quality of over 25 per cent. Although there is no comparable assessment for coastal waters, UK compliance with the bathing water directive's mandatory standards improved from 77 per cent. in 1990 to 90 per cent. in 1996.

Right-to-buy Scheme

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many council tenants have bought their homes under the right-to-buy scheme. [10921]

Mr. Raynsford: A total of 1.295 million homes were sold by local authorities and new towns in England under right-to-buy between the introduction of legislation in October 1980 and the end of March 1997, the latest date for which information is available.

Repossessions

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the number of mortgage repossessions in each year since 1979. [10963]

Mr. Raynsford: The number of properties taken into possession by mortgage lenders in the United Kingdom in each year since 1979 is set out.

1979: 2,910

1980: 3,480

1981: 4,870

1982: 6,860

1983: 8,420

1984: 12,400

1985: 19,300

1986: 24,090

1987: 26,390

1988: 18,510

1989: 15,810

1990: 43,890

1991: 75,540

1992: 68,540

1993: 58,540

1994: 49,210

1995: 49,410

1996: 42,560.

Source:

Council of Mortgage Lenders.

Negative Equity

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of United Kingdom properties in negative equity in each year since 1979. [10962]

Mr. Raynsford: Estimates of the number of households in the United Kingdom with negative equity based on the Department's mix adjusted house prices index are available from 1989. The figures for the final quarter of each year are as follows:

1989: 78,000
1990: 340,000
1991: 507,000
1992: 1,221,000
1993: 894,000
1994: 677,000
1995: 907,000
1996: 287,000.

Green Belt

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to what extent the green belt has altered in size since 1979. [10985]

Mr. Raynsford: We do not record the size of green belts on an annual basis. Figures for England for 1979, 1989 and 1993 are available in the "Digest of Environmental Statistics" No. 18 published in 1996. In 1979 there were 7,215 sq km of green belt land. This had more than doubled to 15,557 sq km in 1993.

Housing (Voluntary Transfer Scheme)

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many council estates have been transferred to private landlords through the large-scale voluntary transfer scheme. [10929]

Mr. Raynsford: Information on the number of estates included in transfers on the annual disposals programme—large-scale voluntary transfers—is not available; 57 authorities have carried out such transfers since December 1988, involving a total of 250,407 properties. Only two have involved single estates—Manchester's estate at Partington and the Beechdale estate in Walsall. Of the rest, 51 have been transfers of the whole stock and four have been partial stock transfers.

Dangerous Animals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many licences to keep dangerous animals have been issued in each of the last five years in each local authority area; and if he will make a statement; [10785]

(2) in what circumstances licences to keep dangerous animals are issued; and if he will make a statement. [10786]

Angela Eagle: A licence is required to keep any animal of a species listed in the schedule to the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. The issuing of licences and the day-to-day administration of the Act are the responsibility of the relevant local authority. The Department does not keep information on the number of licences issued under the Act.

Before issuing a licence, a local authority must be satisfied that a number of conditions are met, including the conditions that a licence would not be contrary to the public interest on the grounds of safety or nuisance; that the applicant for the licence is a suitable person to hold a licence; and that the proposed accommodation ensures that the animal will not escape and is suitable as regards construction, size, temperature, lighting, ventilation, drainage and cleanliness, and is suitable for the number of animals proposed to be held in it. A local authority may also specify such other conditions as it considers appropriate.

Plastic Silage Wrap

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to encourage local waste disposal authorities to provide for the safe disposal of black silage bag plastic. [9991]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* Waste disposal authorities, under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, have a duty to arrange for the disposal of controlled waste collected in their area by waste collection authorities. Authorities do not, however, have a duty to dispose of waste from premises used for agriculture. Farmers, as producers of such waste, should aim to recover or reuse such waste where possible or arrange for it to be disposed of at a licensed waste facility. We are considering whether further legal controls are necessary to ensure that waste producers manage their waste responsibly and dispose of it sensibly. Currently, general guidance is provided to farmers in codes of good agricultural practice for the protection of air and soil, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has recently invited bids for a project to develop and test a manual to help farmers minimise waste, including silage bag plastic.

EU Environmental Proposals

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what changes he expects to introduce to his Department's monitoring of environmental proposals developed by the European Commission following the Commission's announcement on 11 July of a new set of guidelines to strengthen the environmental content of Commission proposals. [10618]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* I strongly welcome the strengthening of its internal procedures announced by the European Commission on 11 July, so that environmental considerations are better integrated into the whole range of its policy proposals. Consideration of every Commission proposal is coordinated by the Government Department most closely concerned, to ensure that its implications are assessed against the entire range of Government policies and objectives, including those for protection of the environment. We will keep the impact of the Commission's new measures under review, and will consider whether any further action is necessary.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what research he has commissioned into the use of tradeable quotas as a means of reducing carbon dioxide emissions; [10627]

(2) what representations he has received on the use of tradeable quotas as a means of reducing carbon dioxide emissions; [10625]

(3) what discussions he has held with the European Commission about the use of tradeable quotas as a means of reducing carbon dioxide emissions. [10626]

Mr. Meacher: As part of our preparations for the negotiations leading to the climate change convention conference in Kyoto in December, the potential for the use of tradeable quotas as a means of meeting targets in the period after 2000 is being examined within Government and discussed with interested non-governmental organisations, including industry, and other member states of the European Union and the Commission.

Household Growth Management

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will bring forward new policies to manage household growth; and if he will make a statement; [10819]

(2) if he will give *(a)* environmental capacity, *(b)* housing need, *(c)* the provision of smaller homes and *(d)* the involvement of local communities in planning decisions priority in developing his policies for managing household growth. [10820]

Mr. Raynsford: We are considering the responses to the consultation on last year's Green Paper on this issue, in helping us to decide on the right way forward. We will consider my hon. Friend's points as part of that process.

Methyl Bromide

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the safety of methyl bromide. [10966]

Angela Eagle: Methyl bromide is a toxic substance. Its use at work is controlled under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994. Specific pesticidal use as a fumigant is further controlled under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986. The Health and Safety Executive has issued an approved code of practice on the control of substance hazardous to health in fumigation operations as well as guidance on fumigation. Methyl bromide causes depletion of the ozone layer and is a controlled substances under the Montreal protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Minister without Portfolio

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Council how many representations she has received from hon. Members concerning the opportunity to put oral questions to the Minister without Portfolio. [10775]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: None.

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Council what proposals she has to allow hon. Members to put oral questions to the Minister without Portfolio regarding his duties and responsibilities other that those relating to the millennium dome. [10776]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: None.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Regional Development Agencies

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the relationship between training and enterprise councils and business links following the Government's proposals to create regional development agencies. [10646]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government are consulting on arrangements for establishing regional development agencies. The consultation period will end on 12 September. The implications of the creation of RDAs on the relationship between training and enterprise councils and business links will become clear only after these consultations have been completed and decisions on the role and structure of RDAs agreed.

New Deal

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the areas where the new deal for people aged 18 to 24 years who have been unemployed for six months will start from January 1998. [11395]

Mr. Andrew Smith: From 5 January 1998, the new deal for young unemployed people will be introduced in 12 pathfinder areas covering 15 per cent. of 18 to 24-year-olds unemployed for more than six months. Experience in the pathfinder areas will inform national implementation, which will start on 6 April 1998 and help ensure its success. The pathfinder areas are listed in the table. They have been selected to reflect a range of social and economic areas and so that there is at least one pathfinder in each English region and in Scotland and Wales.

Employment Service region	*Government office*	*Pathfinder area*	*Urban/Rural/ Conurbation (U/R/C)*	*Number of 18 to 24 client group*
1. Office for Scotland	Scotland	Tayside	U/R	1,500
2. Office for Wales	Wales	Swansea and West Wales	U/R	2,399
3. Yorkshire and Humberside	Yorkshire and Humberside	Sheffield and Rotherham	C	3,280
4. London and South East	South East	Eastbourne	U/R	700
5. London and South East	London	Lambeth	C	1,852

Employment Service region	*Government office*	*Pathfinder area*	*Urban/Rural/ Conurbation (U/R/C)*	*Number of 18 to 24 client group*
6. London and South East	Eastern	Harlow and Stevenage	U/R	970
7. North West	North West	Cumbria	R	1,582
8. North West	Merseyside	Wirral	U/R	1,744
9. East Midlands and Eastern	East Midlands	South Derbyshire	U/R	2,591
10. West Midlands	West Midlands	Black Country (North and South)	C	4,588
11. Northern	North East	Newcastle, Gateshead and South Tyne	C	3,536
12. South West	South West	Cornwall	R	1,379
			Total	26,121
	Proportion of national client group (170,400)			15.3 per cent.

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action he proposes to take to ensure that young people in care and who have left local authority care are included in his welfare-to-work programmes. [10817]

Mr. Alan Howarth: All young people aged 18 to 24 who are unemployed for six months or more are eligible for the new deal. We are currently considering whether we should allow early access to the new deal for certain groups.

Schools (Medication)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidelines and controls exist regarding the issuing of medication within schools; and if he will make a statement. [10540]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 places duties on employers, usually the local education authority or governing body in schools, for the health and safety of their employees and anyone else on the premises. Employers are responsible for ensuring the safety of all pupils, and schools must have a written health and safety policy.

Circular 14/96, which was sent to all schools and LEAs in England in October 1996, offered advice on their legal responsibilities for pupils with medical needs. The Department has also produced good practice guidance to help schools put their own policies and procedures in place. Individual decisions about giving medication are best made at the local level.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what plans he has to make provision, in the education service, for children identified as being affected by attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; [10495]

(2) what measures he proposes to assist those suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and their carers; and if he will make a statement; [10496]

(3) what measures he proposes in respect of the education of children affected by attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; and if he will make a statement; [10498]

(4) what representations he has received from the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers regarding classroom behaviour difficulties; what research his Department has evaluated in respect of the role of attention deficit disorder in contributing to such problems; and if he will commission further research in this area. [10502]

Ms Estelle Morris: Provision for children with special educational needs, including those whose needs arise from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, is a matter for local education authorities and schools, which must have regard to the code of practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs. The forthcoming Green Paper on special needs will set out ideas for improving provision across the whole range of special needs. It will emphasise the importance of early identification and co-operation between statutory and voluntary agencies and parents, factors which are of particular relevance to children with ADHD and their carers. Following consultation, the Department will draw up an action plan to take forward the Green Paper's proposals.

My right hon. Friend has received no representations from the National Association of Head Teachers regarding classroom behaviour difficulties. The previous Secretary of State received a number of representations from the association on this matter. I refer the hon. Member to the reply he received from the then Minister on 26 June 1995, *Official Report*, columns *503–504*. The Department has not evaluated research on attention deficit disorder, although officials from the Department have met a number of ADHD groups and discussed with them research in this area, and professional bodies, including the Royal College of Psychiatrists, have issued guidance based on research evidence. We have no current plans to commission further research on ADHD.

Mature Students

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for what reasons students over 50 years of age are not entitled to *(a)* student loans and *(b)* grants; and if he will introduce measures to allow these students access to *(a)* and *(b)*. [10915]

Dr. Howells: Older students are less likely to repay loans because of the shorter time they will work after graduation, but they are more likely to have access to other funds, such as savings or commercial loans. There is no age limit for the means-tested mandatory award. The Government note the recommendations of the national committee of inquiry into higher education on age limits for loans and will bring forward detailed proposals in the autumn.

Student Fees

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many part-time students in further education have to contribute *(a)* all and *(b)* part of their tuition fees; and what was the total financial contribution made by these students in the most recent available year. [10466]

Dr. Howells: Of students funded by the Further Education Funding Council in colleges and external institutions in the 1995–96 academic year in England, 884,000 part-time students paid all their tuition fees and 173,000 paid part of their tuition fees. The total tuition fees paid by these 1.057 million part-time students was £111 million in the same academic year. All the figures are provisional.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total financial contribution made by part-time students towards their fees for approved higher education courses in the most recent available year. [10465]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is not held centrally. In 1996–97, some 60 per cent. of part-time higher education students in UK HE institutions for whom the source of fees was known paid their own fees, but the available information does not record the amounts paid. The total income received by UK HE institutions for part-time HE fees in 1995–96 from all sources was £276.2 million.

Young People in Care

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action he proposes to take to ensure that the educational needs of young people in care are addressed with particular reference to *(a)* the effects of a disrupted education, *(b)* facilities for homework and *(c)* access to and support in (i) further education and (ii) higher education. [10816]

Ms Estelle Morris: We are developing with the Local Government Association guidance to local education authorities on behaviour support plans which will make specific reference to look after young people. We are supporting research for the Who Cares? Trust and Calouste-Gulbenkian Foundation, which will expand knowledge of good practice in the education of these young people.

We are aware of the difficulty for some children when their home environment militates against the completion of homework tasks. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has issued a White Paper—"The People's Lottery"—which sets out proposals for the use of midweek lottery funds to support out-of-school-hours activities including homework clubs. These clubs will provide a place and adult support to help pupils complete homework tasks.

All 16 and 17-year-olds who are not in full-time education or employment are guaranteed the offer of a suitable youth training place if they want one. This guarantee is extended to 18-year-olds and over who have been prevented from completing or taking up YT due to specific circumstances, one of which is if they have been prevented from accessing training as a result of a care order.

Two partnership projects under the new start strategy to be introduced in England in September 1997 to drive up participation and motivation of disaffected young people in learning will target looked after children and care leavers.

It is for individual higher education institutions to determine their admission policies, taking account of evidence from the schools and colleges on the potential of these young people.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children are currently benefiting from the assisted places scheme; and how many have benefited since 1981. [10960]

Mr. Byers: Some 33,140 children held assisted places in the academic year 1996–97 just ended. Since 1981, some 86,400 children have held assisted places at a cost of £918 million to the public purse.

Jobcentres

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what national standards apply to the hours of opening of jobcentres; [10428]

(2) what plans he has to extend the opening hours of jobcentres. [10429]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Mark Oaten, dated July 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions concerning the opening hours of Jobcentres. This is something that falls within the responsibility delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The Employment Service (ES) policy on opening hours is to allow for flexibility in service delivery. ES Regional Directors and District Managers agree with Jobcentre Business Managers hours of opening to suit local circumstances. Offices are termed full-time providing they are open to the public for a minimum of 36 hours per week. Offices open to the public less than 36 hours per week are termed part-time. Only a very few offices are in fact part-time.

In addition we encourage local initiatives to open Jobcentres in the evening or on a Saturday to meet the particular needs of the local labour market, for example for Job Fairs or Open Days where local employers and programme providers are available to give information to clients. Additionally, we provide for extended opening hours where a large number of people need to make a claim for Jobseeker's Allowance at one time; for example in the case of a large scale redundancy.

We continue to keep our policy under review. We are also currently exploring ways of enhancing the delivery of our job broking services through greater use of information technology.

I hope this is helpful.

Education Spending

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what has been the percentage real terms change in the level of education spending per pupil in the maintained sector since 1979; [10889]

(2) what is the current average per capita expenditure on pupils in *(a)* grant-maintained schools and *(b)* local education authority schools. [10958]

Mr. Byers: Since 1979–80, spending per pupil in local education authority's maintained schools, excluding special schools, has increased by 45 per cent. in real terms. In 1995–96, the latest year for which data are available, the average net institutional expenditure per pupil in LEA-maintained pre-primary, primary and secondary schools in England was £1,909. The average expenditure, excluding capital grant funded expenditure per pupil in grant-maintained primary and secondary schools was £2,366.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the change in the number of nursery places available since the introduction of the nursery voucher scheme. [10890]

Mr. Byers: Data on the change in nursery education places since April 1997 are not available.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations his Department has received regarding the impact of a minimum wage on youth employment. [10896]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Department has no record of any such representations, but any received would have been passed to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade who has responsibility for the minimum wage.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Aid and Trade

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the aid and trade provision projects since the inception of aid and trade provision showing for each project *(a)* the recipient country, *(b)* the United Kingdom company involved and *(c)* the export value and ATP value. [10604]

Clare Short: The aid and trade provision was introduced in 1977. Since that time, 297 projects have been undertaken in 50 countries involving 185 different UK companies with a total export value of almost £4,443 million and a total ATP value of over £1,623 million. Details of all ATP projects on which agreements have been concluded, by country and the UK company will be deposited in the Libraries of the House.

Indonesia

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about the amount of aid pledged to Indonesia at the recent consultative group for Indonesia meeting, what amounts relate to *(a)* new and *(b)* existing commitments; and if she will list the projects which will be funded under this year's pledges, specifying the amount allocated to each project. [10454]

Clare Short *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* No pledge of new aid was made at the consultative group meeting. The United Kingdom representative provided a forecast of likely expenditure in respect of existing commitments. Information about on-going projects in Indonesia was provided in reply to an earlier question from my hon. Friend, *Official Report*, 16 July 1997, columns *189–92*.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what priority will be accorded to sustainable development in the forthcoming White Paper on international development. [10239]

Clare Short: Sustainable development will be at the heart of the forthcoming White Paper. My Department's principal aim is to contribute to the elimination of poverty in poorer countries. We intend to work to enable poor people to realise their rights to human development and achieve sustained improvements in their living standards. This will involve promoting sustainable economic growth, access to essential social services and protection of the global and national environment. A key part of our agenda will be to seek greater policy coherence in our approach to developing countries, both within the UK and with international development partners.

The White Paper will also reflect the Government's commitment to the targets contained in the report of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Shaping the 21st Century". These include the target that every country should have a current national strategy for sustainable development in the process of implementation by 2005, so as to ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources are effectively reversed at both global and national levels by 2015. At the UN General Assembly special session in New York last month, it was agreed that all countries should have sustainable strategies in place by 2002. We regard these targets as compatible and my Department hopes to work in partnership with developing countries on the preparation of such plans.

Investment (Multilateral Agreement)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if the multilateral agreement on investment will be included in the forthcoming White Paper on international development. [10656]

Clare Short: The White Paper is being drafted at the present time, I certainly expect it to include a reference to the agreement.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will publish the latest draft of the multilateral agreement on investment, and place a copy in the Library. [110653]

Clare Short: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade leads on this agreement. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry told the House on 23 July, *Official Report*, column *677*, the latest draft will be placed in the Library of both Houses.

Poland

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in respect of the flooding, what action is being taken to assist the humanitarian relief effort in Poland; and if she will make a statement. [10676]

Clare Short: We have provided £100,000 through the United Nations department of humanitarian affairs for the provision of medical supplies to the flood victims in southern Poland. We also provided advice on identifying water engineers to assist in dispersing the flood water. We are in contact with the Polish authorities about further help that we might provide.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Iraq

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what projects the Export Credits Guarantee Department supported relating to the services or infrastructure of the mines and railways in the Akashat area of Iraq before 1990; if any costs were incurred by the ECGD as a result of such support; and whether any liabilities relating to such support are still outstanding. [10092]

Mrs. Roche: In 1987, the ECGD provided £14.8 million of cover in support of a contract to provide water treatment plants and related pipelines for the Akashat railway. The ECGD paid £10.2 million of claims on this contract and this amount remains outstanding.

Encryption

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on encryption and the licensing of trusted third parties. [10392]

Mrs. Roche: An analysis of the responses to the consultation paper is currently under way. As soon as this process has been completed, and following discussion with ministerial colleagues, a statement will be made.

Devon and Cornwall TEC

Mr. Burnett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total funding made available by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Devon and Cornwall training and enterprise council to *(a)* the North Devon Business Link and *(b)* the North Devon Enterprise Agency. [9700]

Mrs. Roche: My Department contracts with Devon and Cornwall training and enterprise council for the provision of funding to the business link Devon and Cornwall network. The current total funding made available is £8.5 million. Information on the funding which the business link Devon and Cornwall network has then made available to the North Devon Business Link outlet is not held by my Department. North Devon Enterprise Agency received £20,000 of funding between 1986 and 1987 under the then Department of Employment's local enterprise agency grant scheme.

Advisory Bodies

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the key functions of the Measurement Advisory Committee; when the committee was established; by what authority; and if she will list the names of the chairman and the secretary. [9638]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The key functions of the Measurement Advisory Committee are to advise the Department on the effectiveness with which the national measurement system supports UK industry; and the priorities the Department should assign to programmes of work undertaken to meet the needs of the national measurement system.

The committee is an advisory non-departmental public body, whose chairman and members' appointments are personal, unpaid and voluntary. The committee was established in 1994 under the authority of the then President of the Board of Trade to replace the Standards, Quality and Measurement Advisory Committee established in 1988. The current chairman, Mr. William Goldfinch OBE, has recently been appointed ror a three-year term with effect from 1 July 1997 and replaces the previous chairman, Sir Ivor Cohen, who retied on 30 June 1997.

The committee does not have a formal secretary, but is serviced by the technology and standards directorate of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how her Department plans to ensure that UK trade and investment policies contribute to sustainable development in poorer countries. [10439]

Mrs. Roche: My Department is working with the Department for International Development and others to consider the ways in which UK trade and investment policies can promote sustainable development. The Government's forthcoming White Paper on international development will set out the detail of policies designed to achieve that objective.

International Development

Mr. Ruane: To ask the president of the Board of Trade what contribution her Department is making to the White Paper on international development. [9312]

Mrs. Roche: My Department is a member of an inter-departmental steering group, chaired by the Department for International Development, which is responsible for the preparation of the forthcoming White Paper.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what ways her Department is collaborating with the Department for International Development to ensure that the potential contribution of UK trade policies to overseas development is fully reflected in the forthcoming White Paper on international development. [10438]

Mrs. Roche: My Department is working closely with the Department for International Development in the preparation of the forthcoming White Paper on international development and is a member of the interdepartmental steering group tasked with taking forward the process.

Retail Petrol Industry

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Office of Fair Trading inquiry into the retail petrol industry will be completed. [10535]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 25 July 1997]*: The Director General of Fair Trading announced in a press release on 10 June 1997 that he expects the OFT review of the petrol market in the UK to be completed by the autumn.

Gas Liberalisation

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which Minister will handle the negotiation over gas liberalisation in Europe. [10458]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 25 July 1997]*: The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry, who has already attended the Energy Council at which these issues were discussed.

Overseas Investment

Mr. Grieve: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of overseas investment by United Kingdom-based companies in each year since 1979. [10840]

Mrs. Roche: The information is given in the following table. Flows represent the value of investment undertaken during any year. Stock figures show the book value of UK investment at the end of each year. They give the cumulative value of UK overseas direct investment after allowing for depreciation.

Direct investment overseas by UK residents 1979–96

£ million

	Flows	*Stocks*
1979	5,889	31,403
1980	4,867	33,211
1981	6,005	44,927
1982	4,091	52,039
1983	5,417	57,823
1984	6,042	75,119
1985	8,430	69,445
1986	11,649	80,669
1987	19,147	85,286
1988	20,863	103,657
1989	21,503	122,434
1990	10,490	119,722
1991	9,056	125,253
1992	10,850	148,444
1993	17,737	169,038
1994	21,982	172,296
1995	27,927	202,769
1996	28,560	214,633

Source: ONS Central Shared Databank.

Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action was taken to prevent a conflict of interest on the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe's non-BP shares before he placed them in a blind trust, in respect of decisions on *(a)* whether to subscribe for rights shares, *(b)* whether to take cash or share dividend, *(c)* whether to accept bids and demerger proposals and *(d)* how to receive windfall distributions. [10930]

Mrs. Beckett: From the day of his appointment, the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe treated all his investments as if they were already located within a blind trust by refraining from giving any instructions to his bank as to how the portfolio should be handled. Discretionary decisions of this type, if any, were taken by the portfolio manager without reference to the Minister.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what factors led to the delay in putting the non-BP shares of the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe into a blind trust. [10968]

Mrs. Beckett: From the day of his appointment, the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe treated all his investments as if they were already located within a blind trust by refraining from giving any instructions to his bank as to how the portfolio should be handled. Discretionary decisions of this type, if any, were taken by the portfolio manager without reference to the Minister. The formal arrangements for setting up the trust are now complete and involved a necessary period of preparatory work by the Minister's bank.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade where the three meetings took place between the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe and BP directors. [10924]

Mrs. Beckett: At BP's offices at Britannic house and in a restaurant.

Communauté Européene Mark

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reasons machinery not intended for sale is required to carry the Communauté Européene mark; and what is the cost of obtaining the CE mark. [10360]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Manufacturers of relevant machinery who put that machinery into service in the course of a business must properly affix the CE marking in accordance with the requirements of regulation 12 of the Supply of Machinery (Safety) Regulations 1992, as amended. The regulations implement the machinery directive, 89/392/EEC as amended. The CE marking demonstrates conformity with the relevant essential health and safety requirements of the regulations and the duty to ensure that the machinery is in fact safe for users. The cost of compliance will depend on the cost of bringing the machinery into conformity with that legislation.

Commercial Debts (Interest)

Mr. McNulty: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress her Department has made on the proposal in the Queen's Speech for a statutory right to claim interest on commercial debts. [11224]

Mrs. Roche: The Government are publishing today a Green Paper, "Improving the Payment Culture: A Statutory Right to Claim Interest on Late Payment of Commercial Debt". It sets out the Government's proposal to give small businesses the right to charge interest on late payment of commercial debts. It is proposed that this new right will be extended to all businesses after a period to be set following this consultation.

Late payment of commercial debt is acknowledged by many in the business community to be a serious problem, especially for small businesses which are least able to bear the additional costs arising from payment delays. The proposed legislation recognises the fundamental part small businesses play in the economy of the UK and the seriousness of any actions that unnecessarily hinder their competitiveness.

The right to claim interest is to be found in many other countries, especially within Europe. It is the Government's view that it is time that the right should be available in the UK.

The proposals are designed to act as a deterrent to late payers who have, in effect, been using their commercial creditors as a source of finance. Any late payment, like any other breach of contract, should attract appropriate sanctions. The proposed legislation will help to improve the payment culture by enabling creditors to charge interest on late payment of commercial debt at a rate to be set following consultation. Initially, this right will be available only to small businesses for use against public sector organisations and large businesses. The Green Paper sets out proposals for phasing in the extension of the right to all businesses. This is because the Government recognise that small businesses, with their more limited resources, must be given time to benefit from being paid promptly by their large creditors and to take the necessary actions to ensure that they have the systems in place to make payments on time.

The Government recognise that the proposed legislation alone will not solve the problem of late payment. Providing for a statutory right to claim interest is very which important. It is one element of a package of measures which we are pursuing to encourage a change in attitudes and behaviour towards a more ethical approach to payment.

I am delighted to say that a number of leading business representative organisations have pledged to join the Government in tackling the problem of late payment. They include the Forum of Private Business, the British chambers of commerce, the Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Institute of Directors, the Union of Independent Companies, the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union.

These bodies, like the Government, are committed to helping small firms to see how they can manage their finances effectively and thus benefit from the increased competitiveness which a good cash flow can bring.

Over the next 12 months, we will work with those bodies on a number of initiatives. These will include making available to their members and other small firms advice and information on cash flow management, further publicity for the British standard for payment and other measures such as the CBI's prompt payment code, and making the payment practices of the public sector and large firms more visible. We will also work with them to find other ways of encouraging sound payment practices so that all UK industry can enjoy the benefits of a fair payment culture.

The Government are determined to change the payment culture in the UK. It will enhance the existing requirement for plcs and their large private subsidiaries to disclose the average time taken to pay suppliers by producing league tables with the private sector.

The Government are also committed to improving public sector payment performance. Government Departments and agencies must pay 100 per cent. of their undisputed invoices for commercial debt on time. They will have to monitor and report on their success in meeting this stringent target.

Quangos

Mr. David Heath: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the quangos within her Department's responsibility which she has to date announced her intention *(a)* to abolish and *(b)* to make subject to a significant element of democratic accountability. [9678]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* On the issue of the abolition of quangos, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) on 18 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *174*, which stated that a review of quangos with the aim of reducing overall numbers has been announced. I cannot, of course, pre-empt the results of that review.

On the issue of democratic accountability, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley) on 24 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *693*, on that issue.

EU Enlargement

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps the Government are taking to promote trade with the potential new members of the EU in eastern and central Europe. [9983]

Mrs. Roche: Ten countries of central and eastern Europe—Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia—have association agreements with the EU carrying the promise of EU membership on certain conditions. On 15 July, the European Commission recommended that accession negotiations start with the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. In December, the European Council is expected to make a decision about the opening of negotiations.

The Government place a high priority on successful enlargement to the east. EU demand and competitiveness will be stimulated through expansion of the single market by up to 100 million consumers, improving the opportunities for British trade and investment in the region.

Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia are part of a joint DTI-FCO promotional campaign—"Open for Business in Central Europe". The 18-month campaign, which began in January 1997, aims to raise awareness among British companies of the opportunities in these markets, both generally and in five identified industrial sectors—health care, automotive, consumer goods-retailing, agribusiness and IT-telecommunications-electronics.

The first part of the campaign, which has now ended, involved 13 general awareness seminars held around the UK. The second stage will concentrate more on the specific sectors, with seminars, trade fairs and inward and outward missions. It will also address a number of important issues, such as getting paid, distribution and finding an agent. This will be done through three major showcases, in London, Glasgow and Birmingham—8, 15 and 23 October 1997 respectively. The final stage of the campaign will concentrate on investment.

Trade with the Baltic states is being promoted through a series of Baltic business seminars; by providing support for trade missions and advice and information both in London and in the region. Similar initiatives are being undertaken for Romania and Bulgaria.

Assistance is available for UK companies active in the region through the know-how fund schemes to support pre-investment feasibility studies and training of key staff. The DTI overseas trade services publication "Sources of information, finance and advice on trade and investment in Central and Eastern Europe" lists these and other forms of support for British trade and investment in the region.

Business Links

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement about the progress and effectiveness of business links, with particular reference to the involvement of the private sector. [10647]

Mrs. Roche: Business links are run by private sector led partnerships of training and enterprise councils, chambers of commerce, enterprise agencies, local authorities, and other providers of business support. Business link boards are business-led; this ensures that business has a strong voice in the development of services focused on the needs of small and medium enterprise customers.

The network was completed earlier this year with each of the 89 business link partnerships in England now having at least one outlet—giving 100 per cent. business link coverage to the SME sector.

Over the last quarter:

- more than 10,000 different businesses used business links each week
- more than 112,800 different businesses used the business link information and advice services;
- more than 21,200 businesses were advised by personal business advisers
- more than 28,800 businesses received counselling.

The quarterly report on business link and business link regional supply network management information—URN 96123—is regularly published and a copy is available in the Library.

Lone Parents

Mr. Fallon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if those people who are trained as child carers as part of her Department's welfare to work for lone mothers will be eligible for the new national minimum wage. [9048]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The national minimum wage will be introduced sensibly and will take account of the needs of young trainees and not penalise occupational training activity, including that which provides training as child carers as part of the Government's welfare-to-work scheme.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if she will make a statement on recent changes to expenses made payable to appellants and their representatives attending industrial tribunals; and if she will outline what plans she has to ensure that those attending industrial tribunals can claim travel and subsistence allowances; [10308]

(2) what assessment she has made of the impact of the removal of certain travel and subsistence allowances for those attending industrial tribunals as representatives of voluntary bodies; and if she will make a statement. [10309]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Changes to the expenses payable to parties and witnesses appearing before industrial tribunals were announced on 17 February 1997, *Official Report*, column *374*, and came into effect on 1 April 1997. A range of expenses and allowances is payable, including the cost of travel by public transport or mileage expenses, a loss of earnings allowance and, where appropriate, an overnight subsistence allowance. Expenses are not normally paid to parties' representatives although, exceptionally, payment may be made to unpaid representatives of bodies such as citizens advice bureaux and free representation units which claim expenses on the same basis as parties and witnesses. No assessment has yet been made of the impact of the changes on such bodies.

The Government recognise the importance of ensuring that parties are able to attend and present their cases before industrial tribunals. The arrangements for expenses and allowances to parties and witnesses will be kept under review.

High-pressure Marketing

Miss McIntosh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what plans she has to amend *(a)* part III of the Fair Trading Act 1973 and *(b)* the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 to provide increased consumer protection against (i) unsolicited visits and (ii) high-pressure marketing techniques in the building and home improvement industry; [10557]

(2) if she will amend the regulations governing contracts concluded away from business premises to provide elderly and vulnerable consumers with increased protection against unsolicited visits and high-pressure marketing techniques in the building and home improvement industry. [10558]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: We are determined to see that these problems are addressed. We want to ensure that all the relevant legislation enables effective action to be taken against rogue traders who cause so much distress and financial hardship to consumers.

The Consumer Protection (Contracts Concluded Away from Business Premises) Regulations 1987 and part III of the Fair Trading Act 1973 are particularly relevant where unsolicited visits and high pressure selling are involved. We will shortly be consulting on proposals to amend the 1987 regulations in order to strengthen the consumer protection that they provide. We also see a case for reforming part III. The Director General of Fair Trading has promised further detailed proposals on this shortly. When we have them, we shall consider them fully and consult widely. We shall also be working with my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for construction, who has a particular interest in the performance of the building industry.

Animal Imports

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* dangerous wild animals and *(b)* exotic animals were imported into the United Kingdom in each of the last five years from each continent; and if she will make a statement. [10782]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

Information in the form requested is not held centrally. Data on imports to the United Kingdom and other EU member states under the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora are published by the European Commission and include endangered live animals. I am arranging for the data supplied by the United Kingdom for the EU reports between 1991 and 1995 to be placed in the Library of the House.

Electro-shock Weapons

Mr. Rapson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action is being taken to ban the export of electro-shock weapons, including batons; if she will hold a formal investigation into the trading of these weapons by British companies; and if she will make a statement. [5493]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have been asked to reply.

We are committed to preventing British companies from manufacturing, selling or procuring equipment designed primarily for torture and to press for a global ban. There is clear evidence that certain equipment has been used for torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. I can now announce that we will take the necessary measures to prevent the export or transhipment from the UK of the following equipment:

> Portable devices designed or modified for riot control purposes or self-protection to administer an electric shock, including electric-shock batons, electric-shock shields, stun guns, and tasers, and specially designed components for such devices.
>
> Leg-irons, gang-chains, shackles—excluding normal handcuffs—and electric-shock belts designed for the restraint of a human being.

Some of the above goods are not presently controlled and we will be amending the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 to bring them under control.

The acquisition, purchase, possession, manufacture, sale and transfer of electric-shock weapons is already regulated by the Firearms Act 1968 as amended. We are examining how to take forward our commitment to ban the manufacture and possession of the other goods listed.

Our review of strategic export controls, which is being led by the Department of Trade and Industry, sought views on the extent to which any new legislation should seek to control trafficking in undesirable goods and the brokering of such deals. As my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade said on 5 June, *Official Report*, column *236*, we are considering all the responses to the consultation carefully in formulating our proposals, which will be announced soon.

If we are to prevent would-be torturers from procuring such equipment elsewhere, similar controls will need to be implemented by other countries. To this end, we will seek to encourage EU member state to impose similar restrictions to those announced above as a first step towards a global ban. We shall report to the House on progress in this and our other efforts to promote respect for human rights.

Illegal trading in such weapons would amount to an offence under section 5(1) (b) of the Firearms Act 1968. Any allegation that British companies are involved in such activities should be brought to the attention of the police.

WALES

Health and Environmental Education

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment his Department has made of the teaching of *(a)* personal health care, *(b)* nutrition and *(c)* environmental awareness in Welsh schools; and if he will make a statement. [9849]

Mr. Hain: The office of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in Wales published on 17 June the results of a recent survey "Standards and Quality in Personal and Social Education (PSE)", which covers teaching on health education, healthy eating and the environment in secondary schools. A copy of the publication is in the Library of the House.

The White Paper "Building Excellent Schools Together", published on 8 July, announced a review of the PSE curriculum by ACAC—the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales—as part of its review of the national curriculum for Wales.

Welsh Assembly

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the Committee of Public Accounts will retain all its existing powers to examine public expenditure in Wales under his proposals for a Welsh Assembly. [10698]

Mr. Ron Davies: It is proposed that the Public Accounts Committee would retain its existing powers under a Welsh Assembly. The Public Accounts Committee may wish to delegate some of its functions, for instance the taking of evidence, to the Assembly's audit committee.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the Assembly will have powers to designate or vary assisted area boundaries. [10703]

Mr. Davies: No. These functions are performed by the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what powers the Assembly will have to abolish NHS trusts and take over their powers; and what powers it will have to appoint members to trust boards. [10709]

Mr. Davies: The Government propose that the Assembly will have the same powers in respect of health that I now have. These include powers to establish or dissolve an NHS trust or to extend or curtail its functions, subject to the requirement's of primary legislation.

It will be able to make an order dissolving a trust if it considers this appropriate in the interests of the health service, or on the application of the trust concerned. If dissolving a trust, it will need to make provision for transferring its property, rights, liabilities and staff to another trust, or to a health authority, or to itself.

It will also have power to appoint the chairman and non-executive directors of a trust in accordance with established Nolan principles relating to public appointments.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales to what extent the Assembly, in deciding how much local authorities will be allowed to borrow, will be constrained by Treasury rules or guidelines. [10701]

Mr. Davies: The Assembly will be able to decide for itself what proportion of its total budget should be allocated to local authority credit approvals as against other, competing areas of expenditure.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements will be introduced to ensure co-operation between the Executive Committee of the Welsh Assembly and relevant Cabinet Committees. [10696]

Mr. Davies: The Secretary of State for Wales will continue to represent Wales's interests on appropriate Cabinet Committees, informed by the views of the Assembly.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales to what extent his powers *(a)* to establish an economic powerhouse and *(b)* to reform the multiplicity of national and local agencies, referred to in paragraph 2.5 of the White Paper, are dependent on the introduction of a Welsh Assembly. [10705]

Mr. Davies: The Government's manifesto contained a commitment to establish an economic powerhouse agency. This change would precede the establishment of a Welsh Assembly. However, the reform of this and the other quangos would be incomplete without establishing their democratic accountability to an elected Welsh Assembly, to provide the necessary openness, scrutiny and responsiveness to the needs of Wales.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what reasons he has not proposed transferring the powers of the boards of the Welsh executive quangos to the Welsh Assembly. [10699]

Mr. Davies: All non-departmental public bodies in Wales will be subject to local democratic control. The Assembly will make appointments to the boards, set the strategic framework and provide their funding. If it wished, it could appoint members of the Assembly to the boards of these public bodies.

Under the Government's proposals, the Assembly will—if it so chooses—to be able to transfer to itself the functions of six executives NDPBs.

The Government are proposing to take action to wind up five other executive NDPBs by the time the Assembly is established. The functions of Tai Cymru will be transferred to the Secretary of State and, subsequently, to the Assembly. The Government believe that it makes better sense for the functions of the Development Board for Rural Wales and Land Authority for Wales to be merged with those of the Welsh Development Agency. The functions of the Cardiff Bay development corporation will be transferred to local authorities in its area, while those of the Residuary Body for Wales will disappear.

In the case of the five executive NDPBs that were created by royal charter or royal warrant, it would not be appropriate for a parliamentary Bill to give the Assembly the power to revoke the charters or warrants or to make amendments to them. Amendments to charters and warrants are a matter for Her Majesty the Queen.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what studies the Government have *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the effect of the creation of an Assembly on Welsh inward investment. [10704]

Mr. Davies: None. But the creation of a Welsh Assembly will make Wales an even more attractive proposition not just for inward investors but for indigenous companies. It will help us to market Wales in a more cohesive way.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what powers additional to those currently held by his Department will be required by the Assembly to enable it to give extra powers to local authorities. [10710]

Mr. Davies: The Government propose to give the Welsh Assembly a wide-ranging power to transfer functions from various public bodies to local authorities, among others, as set out in paragraph 3.24 of the White Paper.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the existing powers of the Welsh Office to take functions away from local government; and if these will be passed to the Assembly. [10702]

Mr. Davies: I have many powers to take functions away from individual local authorities. They include:

power to establish joint boards for the public library service, under section 3 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964;

power to establish a joint board as the port health authority for a port health district, under section 2 of the Public Health (Control of Diseases) Act 1984;

power to establish joint planning boards, under section 2 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990;

power to call in all or part of a unitary development plan for decision, under section 18 of the 1990 Act;

power to call in planning applications, under section 77 of the 1990 Act;

power to take over local authority duties under various sections of the Food Safety Act 1990;

powers in sections 33 and 34 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994, to require local authorities to establish joint working arrangements, or to establish joint authorities to discharge functions;

power to place control of a school requiring special measures in the hands of an education association, under section 31 of the School Inspections Act 1996.

The Government propose that powers such as these should be transferred to the Assembly, whether or not they have previously been used in Wales. Unless I use the powers in the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 by 31 March 1999, they will cease to have effect on that date and will not be transferred to the Assembly.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what direct participation in the decision making of the European Union the Welsh Assembly will have. [10697]

Mr. Ron Davies: The lead United Kingdom Minister is responsible for co-ordinating and settling the UK policy line in negotiations. Welsh interests will be fully represented. Wherever it is responsible for the activity in Wales, the Assembly will have a role to play in the delegations at the Council of Ministers through keeping them advised of its views. This will supplement existing arrangements whereby the Secretary of State may himself participate in Council meetings and promote agreed UK objectives.

The Assembly will be free to reinforce this at the stage of policy formation through its own scrutiny of proposals which are to come forward to the Council, as well as other important European documents. It will be able to assess these taking into account the distinct needs and circumstances in Wales and to communicate its views effectively to Whitehall. The Assembly will need to work in close partnership with those Whitehall Departments that are responsible for UK policy development and the basis for this relationship will be set out in concordats. The Secretary of State for Wales will continue to participate fully in the formulation of Government policy and to represent the needs of Wales in Cabinet and Cabinet Committees.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of the announced five Welsh executive bodies to be abolished before the Assembly is established were due to be abolished within five years; and what is the existing abolition date for each. [10700]

Mr. Davies: Plans already existed to wind up the Cardiff Bay development corporation and the Residuary Body for Wales. The CBDC was provisionally due to be wound up in December 1999; I have decided to extend this slightly to March 2000, to coincide with the end of the financial year and thus allow for a more orderly termination of its affairs. The Residuary Body for Wales had a lifetime of five years written into the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 which established it, and was due to be wound up in February 2000. Its task is, though, almost complete already, and I aim to wind it up in the near future.

I am also taking early steps to wind up two of the six training and enterprise councils in Wales, the Welsh Health Common Services Authority and the Health Promotion Authority for Wales.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what reasons his proposals in his White Paper treat the Funding Council for Higher Education differently from the Funding Council for Further Education; and if he will make a statement. [10762]

Mr. Davies: The traditional independence of the universities has meant that successive Governments have, for decades, left decisions on their funding to specialised, arm's-length bodies; the University Grants Committee and now the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

The proposal that the Further Education Funding Council for Wales should be within the Assembly's reform power does not mean that the independence of further eduction institutions is under threat. The function of funding further education would still remain. However, there are options for reform which the Assembly may wish to consider, taking account of the increasing links between the higher and further education sectors and the position of vocational training, which is currently funded by the training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which sections of his White Paper "A Voice for Wales", Cm. 3718, indicate the evolving nature of the proposed Welsh Assembly; and what provisions there are for the people of Wales to vote for or against increases of power or expansion of role. [10781]

Mr. Davies: The people of Wales are being asked to vote on the proposals in the White Paper Paragraph 1.8 deals with the power to transfer functions to the Assembly and annexe A outlines the Secretary of State for Wales's functions which it is proposed to transfer.

Paragraph 1.9 lists certain functions which currently operate on a common basis throughout the United Kingdom and which the Government do not propose to transfer to the Assembly.

If at some future date any additional functions were to be transferred to the Assembly, they would require a transfer order subject to the approval of both Houses of Parliament.

Apart from fresh primary legislation passed by Parliament, transfer orders will be the only means of adding to the Assembly's functions: the Assembly will not have the power to pass its own primary legislation.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate votes currently within his Department will remain his responsibility after the establishment of the proposed Welsh Assembly. [10758]

Mr. Davies: The details of the vote structure under a Welsh Assembly are still under consideration.

Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment his Department has made of the prevalence of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each health authority; what measures he proposes to assist sufferers and their carers; and if he will make a statement. [10497]

Mr. Win Griffiths: There are at present no centrally available figures on the prevalence of this disorder. The Welsh Office has contributed to the funding of an extensive Office of Population Censuses and Surveys survey into child and adolescent mental health which should establish the true prevalence rate. The assessment of need in any particular area and the provision of services is a matter for the relevant health authority working in conjunction with the local social services department and other statutory agencies. The need for good inter-agency co-operation was emphasised in the Welsh Office report "The Health of Children in Wales", issued in January this year.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the amount of grant aid given by his Department to *(a)* the hyperactive children's support group and *(b)* other voluntary organisations concerned with the treatment of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [10499]

Mr. Griffiths: The Welsh Office has given no direct grants to the support group or to other voluntary organisations in this field over the last five years. Records are not kept in a way which could easily establish whether any such body applied for funding during the period in question.

Mental Illness

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for *(a)* each of the health authorities and *(b)* for Wales the number of places available in accommodation schemes for people with severe mental illness; what proposals he has to promote high-level support accommodation schemes for the severely mentally ill; and if he will make a statement. [10503]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The method of collecting this data does not differentiate between severe and other categories of mental illness. The following figures are the latest available for all mental illness accommodation:

Health authority	*NHS beds 1996–97*[1]	*Private nursing home beds*[2]	*Residential places*[3]
Bro Taf	749	238	71
Morgannwg	670	182	122
Dyfed Powys	430	250	217
Gwent	403	619	40
North Wales	396	905	157
All Wales	2,648	2,194	607

[1] Average daily available in the specialties of mental illness, child and adolescent psychiatry, forensic psychiatry and old age psychiatry.

[2] At 31 March 1996.

[3] Homes that record client group as mental health (not including elderly mentally infirm).

The all-Wales strategy on mental illness stipulates that a comprehensive range of services and facilities must be provided locally. Health authorities are responsible for assessing the mental health needs of their population and for delivering appropriate services, including accommodation, day and domiciliary facilities, to meet those needs.

Public and NHS Bodies

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the forecast total expenditure of *(a)* Welsh non-departmental public bodies and *(b)* Welsh NHS bodies in each of the next three years. [10708]

Mr. Ron Davies: Over the next few months, I shall be re-examining the allocation of spending within the overall Welsh Office budget for 1998–99. Decisions about resources for the following two years will be made on the basis of the conclusions of the comprehensive spending review.

Smoking

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking in Wales to discourage young people from smoking. [10917]

Mr. Win Griffiths: In partnership with other agencies, the Health Promotion Authority for Wales is taking forward a range of activities to discourage young people from smoking, including:

a teenage smoking programme which involves the development of classroom education material, research into school no-smoking policies and the sale of cigarettes to under-16s, and monitoring of tobacco advertising activity;

Smokebusters Wales—a club for young people aged nine to 13 who pledge not to smoke;

life education centres—mobile classrooms for primary schools which, among other things, help to promote awareness of how the body is affected by tobacco;

a smoke-free class competition

The Government have also pledged to ban tobacco advertising and to produce a White Paper which will put forward a range of other measures to combat smoking.

DEFENCE

Future Large Aircraft

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now proceed to a request for a proposal with France and Germany in respect of the procurement of future large aircraft. [10931]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 2 June, *Official Report*, column *13*.

Company Payments

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many companies were paid £5 million or more by his Department in 1996. [9405]

Mr. Spellar: Some 172 contractors were paid £5 million or more by the MOD in 1995–96. The 1997 edition of "Defence Statistics" is due to be published on 29 July 1997.

Where chief executives of defence agencies have responsibility for such payments under the terms of their framework documents, I have asked them to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 28 July 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about companies paid more than £5 million in 1996 as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

During the financial year 1996/97, 15 companies were paid £5million or more by DERA, the majority of which were providing utilities and site services. Information for the calendar year 1996 could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

I hope this information is helpful.

Letter from John Clarke to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 28 July 1997:

You recently asked The Secretary of State for Defence, a Parliamentary Question relating to the number of companies which had, in 1996 been paid £5 million or more by the Ministry of Defence.

As this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office, The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to you directly.

My officials have considered your question and I can advise you that no company has been paid £5 million or more during 1996.

I hope this reply has been of assistance.

Letter from C. R. Flood to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 28 July 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence regarding information of payments to companies, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Acting Chief Executive of the Meterological Office.

Two companies were paid £5 million or more in 1996.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what percentage of employees, in each pay band, in the quangos for which his Department is responsible, are of *(a)* Asian origin and *(b)* Afro-Caribbean origin. [8965]

Mr. Spellar: The information requested is as follows:

	Total employees	*Total Asian origin*	*Percentage Asian origin*	*Total Afro-Caribbean origin*	*Percentage Afro-Caribbean origin*
National Army Museum	88	[1]3	3.4	[2]10	11.4
Oil and Pipelines Agency	17	[3]1	5.9	[4]1	5.9
Royal Air Force Museum	102	[5]7	6.9	0	0

Of which grade/pay band or equivalent:

[1] Three museum support.

[2] Six museum support, one typist, one AO, one EO, one curator.

[3] One EO.

[4] One AO.

[5] Four museum support, one AO, one EO, one HEO.

The Royal Naval submarine museum, Royal Naval museum, Royal Marines museum and Fleet Air Arm museum do not employ formal ethnic monitoring of their employees.

Multipurpose Major Combatant Vessel

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his Italian counterparts concerning the experience in developing the multipurpose major combatant vessel. [9415]

Mr. Spellar: It is assumed that the hon. Member is referring to the common new generation frigate project. No discussions have occurred on this subject between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and his Italian counterpart.

Defence Sales

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the total volume of defence industry sales in 1996; [9465]

(2) what was the value of identified defence exports in 1996. [9406]

Mr. Spellar: In 1996–97, the MOD spent an estimated £9,052 million on equipment. It is estimated that defence exports in 1996 were in the region of £5.1 billion.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with defence manufacturers' associations about the Government's proposed policy on defence exports; and if he will make a statement. [10639]

Mr. Spellar: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has discussed the Government's review of the criteria used in considering licence applications for the export of conventional arms with a wide range of interested parties in the course of his normal business.

RAF Upper Heyford

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to demonstrate that best value was achieved for the taxpayer through the arrangements entered into by the Ministry of Defence with the North Oxfordshire Consortium for the development and disposal of land at RAF Upper Heyford. [10331]

Mr. Spellar: The arrangement between North Oxfordshire Consortium and my Department was formed after an extensive assessment of commercial proposals for the sustainable development of the RAF Upper Heyford site. In supporting this arrangement since 1995, the view has been taken that the arrangement with the NOC will realise the commercial and development potential of this important site while remaining sensitive and open to the concerns of the local community. We hope that this will be progressively demonstrated as individual areas are brought forward for redevelopment.

Northern Ireland

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the planned replacement in the summer of River class patrol ships with Hunt class vessels in support of security operations in Northern Ireland. [10561]

Dr. Reid: The conversion of Hunt class mine counter-measures vessels to replace the River class patrol vessels currently used in support of security operations in

Northern Ireland was announced in the 1996 "Statement on the Defence Estimates". At the time, it was estimated that the replacement programme would begin in the summer of 1997. Since the announcement, however, it has become clear that the time scale required for the conversion programme was underestimated and the replacement of River class vessels with Hunts is now planned to commence early next year.

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role the British forces will have in the proposed decommissioning of arms in Northern Ireland. [10560]

Dr. Reid: It is not possible to say at this stage what decommissioning scheme might be agreed and therefore it is not possible to identify precisely what the role of British forces might be. However, the armed forces are prepared to provide technical advice and assistance as required to the proposed independent international commission to facilitate decommissioning. Work on establishing the commission is continuing.

Honours and Awards (Review)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the joint service review of honours and awards; and if he will make a statement. [10761]

Dr. Reid: The joint service review of honours and awards has been in being since 1992 and has been examining all aspects of awards to the armed services. To date, all the gallantry awards have been reformed and rank is now no longer a factor in deciding the level of the award.

The next stage has been the examination of the long service and efficiency awards to the regular forces and the volunteer reserves. Proposals are now at an advanced stage and recommendations will be reviewed by Ministers later this year.

Strategic Defence Review

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the work on phase 1 of the strategic defence review will be completed; and when a decision will be taken on its publication. [10763]

Mr. George Robertson: I shall brief the Defence Select Committee on the main policy themes underlying stage 1 of the strategic defence review, which will guide our more detailed work, when I give evidence to the Committee on 30 July. There will be an opportunity for the House as a whole to debate the policy issues immediately after the recess.

The first stage of the strategic defence review will not be published separately, but will form part of a comprehensive White Paper which will be published when the review has been completed.

Atomic Weapons Establishment, Llanishen

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 30 June, *Official Report*, column 63, which company will be undertaking the site decontamination works at the former atomic weapons establishment site at Llanishen, Cardiff. [10989]

Mr. Spellar: Although, invitations to bid have been issued for the decommissioning and demolition work, it is not yet possible to define the scope of work needed for decontamination. This is dependent on the land quality statement, which will be produced during the decommissioning phase. It is not expected that a decontamination contract will be let before the end of the decade.

Farnborough Aerodrome

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of those companies and organisations which have expressed interest in acquiring the Farnborough aerodrome. [10791]

Mr. Spellar: Five expressions of interest in acquiring Farnborough aerodrome have been received. I am withholding details of the interested parties under exemption 13 of the code of practice on access to Government information.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce his decision on the Government's preferred bidder to acquire the Farnborough aerodrome; and if he will set out a timetable for the disposal. [10790]

Mr. Spellar: My officials are currently considering the expressions of interest in Farnborough which have been received and I expect to have their final recommendation in the very near future. It is still our intention to identify an airfield operator in time for it to be in a position to make full representations to the Rushmore borough council local plan inquiry in spring 1998. A formal lease will not be entered into until a full Civil Aviation Authority licence and planning permission are issued. The lease will reflect the Ministry of Defence's and the airfield operator's continued commitment to the long-term future of Society of British Aerospace Company air show. The intention is for the operator to be on site and operational in time for the Society of British Aerospace Companies 2000 air show.

Boscombe Down Airfield

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the strategic review of Boscombe Down airfield carried out by the Defence Evaluation and Research Organisation . [10548]

Mr. Spellar: The strategic review of Boscombe Down airfield has recently been completed, but it contains commercial information given in confidence to the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, so it would be inappropriate to place a copy in the Library of the House.

UN Implementation Force

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sum is allocated to maintaining the United Kingdom military contribution to IFOR in the current financial year; and what that is as a percentage of the defence budget. [10116]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* The costs in this financial year of the UK's military contribution to the international forces in Bosnia are currently estimated to be something over £200 million. This covers the follow-on costs from the implementation force, which came to an end in December 1996, the UK contingent to the stabilisation force and the costs of supporting air operations. The total is the equivalent of about 1 per cent. of the defence budget.

Strategic Nuclear Settlement

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sum is allocated to maintaining the United Kingdom's strategic nuclear settlement in the current financial year; and what it is as a percentage of the defence budget. [10157]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* The United Kingdom's strategic nuclear deterrent is provided by the Royal Navy's Trident fleet. The capital expenditure on Trident for the financial year 1997–98 is expected to be some £285 million, representing around 1 per cent. of the defence budget. No consolidated estimate of running costs is yet available for 1997–98, although we expect the figure to remain at about 1 per cent. of the defence budget, as in previous years.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances radioactive material is discharged from nuclear submarines into the sea; and if he will make a statement. [10692]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* Under normal operating conditions, there are no radioactive discharges from nuclear submarines. However, with the older classes of submarine there are certain occasions when there may be very small controlled discharges of low-level radioactive water. These instances include chemical dosing to prevent corrosion and following a shutdown of the reactor. These discharges must comply with authorised limits and are carefully monitored.

When alongside, discharges of radioactive material are allowed only into approved and controlled shore-based discharge facilities. The discharge of radioactive material into the sea is not permitted when alongside.

Due to advances in reactor development and technology, radioactive water is not discharged from Vanguard class submarines.

Quangos

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the quangos within his Department's responsibility which he has to date announced his intention *(a)* to abolish and *(b)* to make subject to a significant element of democratic accountability. [9675]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire, (Mr. Pickthall) on 18 June, *Official Report,* column *174*; and to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley) on 24 July, *Official Report*, column *693*.

Copyright

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to ensure compliance with copyright law; and what progress he is making towards taking out a photocopying licence with the Copyright Licensing Agency. [10990]

Mr. Spellar: My Department endeavours to respect the rights of copyright holders by ensuring, through internal memorandums and instructions, that all staff are aware of those rights and comply with copyright law.

My Department has been approached by the Copyright Licencing Agency and is considering the terms of the photocopying licence proposed.

Invincible Class Carriers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Spain and Italy concerning replacement of the Invincible class carriers. [9420]

Mr. Spellar: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has had no discussions with his counterparts in Spain and Italy concerning replacement of the Invincible class carriers.

Courts Martial

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many persons were court martialled in each year since 1990. [9884]

Dr. Reid *[pursuant to his reply, 22 July 1997, c. 531]:* I regret to say there was an error in the column of figures affecting the Royal Navy. A corrected table showing the number of persons court martialled in each year since 1990 is tabled, with the number of persons convicted in brackets.

Year	*RN*	*Army*	*RAF*	*Total*
1990	35	917	145	1,097 (989)
1991	45	718	153	916 (884)
1992	76	763	149	988 (892)
1993	107	677	128	912 (774)
1994	104	600	91	795 (676)
1995	95	430	104	629 (515)

HEALTH

Psychiatric Care (Children)

Mr. Singh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is his policy on the treatment of emotionally disturbed children of both sexes in adult wards; and if he will make a statement; [9969]

(2) what representations he has received on the treatment of emotionally disturbed children in adult wards at Lynfield Mount adult psychiatric hospital, Bradford; and if he will make a statement. [9970]

Mr. Boateng: Our policy is that children under the age of 16 should not be treated in adult psychiatric wards. Separate provision should also be available for adolescents, but there may be occasions when it is appropriate to treat older adolescents in adult wards. We have received no representations about Lynfield Mount hospital.

Health Policy

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the use of a Cabinet Sub-Committee as a method of pursuing cross-department policies in health; and if he will make a statement. [10178]

Ms Jowell: We have received no representations specifically on the use of a Cabinet Sub-Committee in this way. The Government are however, committed to cross-departmental work to improve public health.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the United Kingdom had been living in *(a)* residential homes and *(b)* nursing homes in the most recent year for which figures are available for (i) less than six months, (ii) between six months and a year, (iii) between one and two years, (iv) between two and three years and (v) three years and more. [10415]

Mr. Boateng: Information on length of stay is not routinely collected. The latest available information on length of stay relates to residents in residential care homes for the elderly and younger physically disabled as at 31 March 1988. The number and percentage of residents recorded in each of the requested durations are given in table 1.

The number of residents in residential and nursing care homes in England as at 31 March 1996 and the number of admissions to residential homes during the year ending 31 March 1996, whether by short stay or by long stay, are given in table 2. Information on admissions to nursing homes is not collected centrally.

Table 1: Residents in residential care homes for elderly and homes for the younger physically disabled at 31 March 1988 by length of stay—number and percentage in each duration: England

	(a) Homes for elderly people		*(b) Homes for younger physically disabled people*	
Length of stay as at 31 March 1988	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Under six months	47,400	24	1,000	14
Six months to one year	25,100	13	500	7
One to two years	39,600	20	600	9
Two to three years	27,400	14	600	9
Three or more years	59,400	30	3,900	60
Total (residents with unknown length of stay are excluded)	199,000	100	6,600	100

Source:

Department of Health "Survey of age, sex and length of stay characteristics of residents of homes for elderly people and younger people who are physically handicapped in England at 31 March 1988".

Table 2: Residents in and admissions to residential and nursing care homes, year ending 31 March 1996: England

	(a) Residential homes	*(b) Nursing homes*
Residents as at 31 March 1996		
Long stay	275,800	145,900
Short stay	12,200	
Admissions during the year ending 31 March 1996		
Long stay	102,300	n/a
Short stay	287,300	n/a

Note:

n/a = not available—information on admissions to nursing homes is not collected centrally.

Source:

Department of Health annual statistical returns (RAC5 and KO36).

Residential and Nursing Homes

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 20 May to the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), *Official Report*, column *58*, if he intends to establish a royal commission to look into the funding of long-term care for the elderly; and if he will make a statement. [10836]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for West Suffolk on 20 May 1997, *Official Report*, column *58*.

Efficiency Index Targets

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities and health trusts have failed to meet their efficiency index targets in each of the last two years. [10413]

Mr. Milburn: In 1995–96, 27 district health authorities did not meet their planned efficiency index gains. It is estimated that 49 health authorities did not meet their targets for 1996–97. Trusts are not set efficiency targets in the same way as health authorities. Health authorities and general practitioner fundholders may negotiate efficiency savings with hospitals, but information on these is not held at national level.

In Vitro Fertilisation

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the policy of each health authority in respect of IVF treatment on the national health service, indicating those where patients *(a)* pay nothing, *(b)* pay for drugs only, *(c)* pay for some cycles and *(d)* meet all costs. [10351]

Ms Jowell: Arrangements for the funding of in vitro fertilisation are the responsibility of individual health authorities and the precise information requested is not available centrally. However, some useful information on health authority policies is contained in the College of

Health report on national health service funding of infertility services commissioned by the national infertility awareness campaign—published November 1996. Copies will be placed in the Library.

The Government are reviewing their policy in this area in the context of the wider issue of variations in health service provision.

Hospital Consultant Vacancies

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by region, the number of hospital consultant positions currently vacant and the equivalent number for this time in each of the last five years. [10414]

Mr. Milburn: The latest available information is shown in the table.

Whole-time equivalent of vacant hospital medical consultant posts by region

England at 30 September each year

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
England (Totals)	700	470	540	480	570	690
Northern	70	10	30	30	40	50
Yorkshire	40	20	50	30	40	40
Trent	70	50	80	50	70	50
East Anglian	20	20	20	10	30	20
North-west Thames	20	20	20	30	40	40
North-east Thames	70	70	50	80	50	70
South-east Thames	40	30	10	30	40	50
South-west Thames	70	40	30	30	30	40
Wessex	40	0	10	10	10	20
Oxford	20	20	0	20	10	20
South Western	60	10	40	30	30	40
West Midlands	110	90	110	70	100	100
Mersey	20	20	20	30	40	60
North Western	60	50	60	50	50	80
Special health authorities	20	10	10	0	0	0

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10; 0 indicates a figure less than five.

2. Data for 1996 are not yet available. We expect to have information available in September/October.

3. The census is a snapshot at 30 September each year. Some vacancies will be wholly or partly filled by locums. For others, national health service trusts may find alternative ways to provide the service rather than re-advertising. The numbers give no indication of how long the post has been empty; some of these will be in the process of being filled.

Source:

The medical and dental work force census 30 September 1990 to 1995.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the community health budget has been spent on mental health services in each year since 1988. [10418]

Mr. Boateng: Information on the proportion of the community health budget spent on mental health services in each year since 1988 is in the table.

Year	*Proportion of expenditure (per cent.)*
1988–89	7.5
1989–90	8.6
1990–91	9.2
1991–92	7.4
1992–93	8.7
1993–94	8.4
1994–95	9.5
1995–96	10.2

Figures from 1991 onwards are not directly comparable with earlier years owing to revised NHS accounting practices.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the level of spending on mental health services in each health authority and as a percentage of total expenditure in each health authority in each of the last three years. [10409]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Homeopathy

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the cost-effectiveness of homoeopathic treatments of food allergies; [10350]

(2) if he will issue guidance to health purchasers on the cost-effectiveness of homoeopathy relative to conventional medicine; and if he will issue separate guidance on the cost-effectiveness of homoeopathy relative to conventional treatments for food allergies. [10349]

Ms Jowell: National health service doctors are able to arrange for their patients to receive homoeopathic treatment for their problems, including food allergy, if there is a clinical need and such treatment is considered the most appropriate and cost-effective way of meeting the need.

We have not commissioned or evaluated research into the cost-effectiveness of homoeopathy in relation to treatment of food allergies. We have no plans to issue guidance to the NHS on the cost-effectiveness of homoeopathy generally, or in relation to treatment of food allergies.

Property Sales

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the *(a)* estimated and *(b)* actual value of NHS property sales in each of the last five years. [10417]

Mr. Milburn: Figures providing planned and outturn values of national health service capital receipts are shown in the table.

NHS Capital Receipts £ million (Cash)

Year	*Planned*[1]	*Outturn*[2]
1992–93	200	115
1993–94	200	213
1994–95	234	208
1995–96	220	282
1996–97	310	369

[1] Planned figures are taken from the Department of Health annual report printed prior to the start of each financial year. For example, the 1992–93 planned figure is taken from the February 1992 annual report and the 1993–94 figure is taken from the February 1993 annual report.

[2] Outturn figures are taken from the March 1997 annual report. The 1996–97 figure is the estimated outturn.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has evaluated into links between long-term addictive tendencies and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; and if he will make a statement. [10541]

Mr. Boateng: Research suggests that children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder have an increased risk of developing further problems later in childhood and in adolescence, including substance abuse in some. The nature of any such linkage is, however, not yet clear.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the last three years *(a)* the total amount estimated to have been spent on mental health treatment and *(b)* the total amount estimated to have been spent on treating children diagnosed as suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, indicating in each case the percentage of each item as a proportion of the total health budget; and if he will make a statement. [10545]

Mr. Boateng: Total amounts estimated to have been spent on mental health treatment for the last three years are shown in the table. The information requested on treatment of children diagnosed as suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is not collected centrally.

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Total expenditure	23.016.8 million	23.354.3 million	23,804.6 million
Expenditure on people with mental illness	2,508.0 million	2,472.3 million	2,511.4 million
Percentage of total expenditure	10.9 per cent.	10.6 per cent.	10.65 per cent.

Source:

Health Select Committee and RO3 return.

Note:

All figures are adjusted to 1995–96 prices using hospital and community health services expenditure.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of *(a)* the connection between attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and behaviour problems and aggression among school pupils, *(b)* the number and percentage of pupils affected by attention deficit disorder and *(c)* the degree to which attention deficit hyperactivity disorder may be inherited; and if he will make a statement. [10581]

Mr. Boateng: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is one of several possible causes of behaviour problems, including aggression, in school pupils.

This information is not collected centrally. Recent research suggests that severe hyperkinetic disorder, which is one form of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, is found in about one in 200 children.

It is accepted that there is an inherited contribution to the development of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder but the mode of inheritance is complex.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amount of grant aid given by his Department to *(a)* the hyperactive children's support group and *(b)* other voluntary organisations concerned with the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [10500]

Mr. Boateng: Departmental grant aid to the hyperactive children's support group for 1997–98 and the previous four years is as follows:

1997–98: £5,000

1996–97: £6,000

1995–96: £7,000

1994–95: £7,000

1993–94: £7,000

The Department grant-aids a number of other voluntary organisations that give information and support over a range of child and adolescent mental health disorders and do not focus exclusively on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve the detection rate of children suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder by child psychiatrists and paediatricians; and if he will make a statement. [10504]

Mr. Boateng: Matters concerning clinical performance and effectiveness are for the bodies, including the royal colleges, responsible for professional training, accreditation and development programmes and for clinical audit at local level. The Department has funded and supported a number of initiatives aimed at highlighting the importance of identifying and treating attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent evidence he has evaluated in respect of the number of times children in care are moved; if he will make it his policy to require all social service departments to incorporate a full assessment for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder by a specially qualified medical practitioner into the social services' own assessment as to whether a child should enter care; and if he will make a statement; [10508]

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that every child moved from one foster home to another more than three times should be assessed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; and if he will make a statement. [10507]

Mr. Boateng: No information is currently available centrally from routinely collected data about the number of times children in care are moved.

The criteria for taking children into care are set out in sections 20 and 31 of the Children Act 1989. Before each placement, local authorities are required to undertake a full assessment of a child's needs, including health needs, and match them to an appropriate placement. The assessment should, where appropriate, be made in collaboration with other agencies.

Children are moved from placement to placement for a wide variety of reasons. It is for local authorities to monitor the number of times a child is moved because of placement breakdown. The Department of Health "Looking After Children: Good Parenting, Good Outcomes" system of planning, assessment and review is designed to improve the care of looked after children and to help all those involved in a child's care to ensure more effective outcomes for the child, including health and education.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department gives to adoptive parents who discover that their adopted child is affected by attention deficit disorder or similar conditions; and if he will make a statement. [10510]

Mr. Boateng: Adopted children and their parents have access to the same level of medical care and attention as any other children.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue guidelines to assist head teachers and social workers in providing for the medical problems of hyperactive children; and if he will make a statement [10539]

Mr. Boateng: The Young Minds publication "Mental Health in Your School—A Guide for Teachers and Others Working In Schools" was funded by the Department of Health and published in 1996. It includes a section on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The looking after children assessment and action records, which are completed by social workers who are participating in the looking after children study, includes questions that focus on children's concentration and behaviour. Subsequent questions address the services that have been or are being sought to meet the needs of the child.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received in respect of his Department's advice to child psychiatrists on the treatment of hyperactivity; what plans he has to review the advice; and if he will make a statement. [10543]

Mr. Boateng: None. It is for the relevant professional and academic bodies to review and evaluate evidence for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and to disseminate such information through training and through publications in professional journals and texts.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assess the advantages of promoting a national awareness week focusing on attention deficit disorder and similar conditions; and if he will make a statement. [10547]

Mr. Boateng: We are advised that it is unlikely that attention deficit hyperactivity disorder would benefit from presentation in this way.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's latest assessment of the prevalence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; and what plans he has to allow treatment of the disorder within the national health service. [10494]

Mr. Boateng: Information on the current prevalence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is not collected centrally. A recent review of research suggests that severe hyperkinetic disorder, which is one form of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, is found in about one in 200 children. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is one of many child mental health disorders that is available for treatment in the national health service.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that health professionals are informed of the methods of recognising and treating attention deficit hyperactivity disorder employed in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement. [10542]

Mr. Boateng: It is the responsibility of professional and academic bodies to assess the evidence for the best approaches in the recognition and treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. This evidence is available in literature from around the world, including the United States, and is widely available in professional journals within this country.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the appropriateness of conventional family therapy in the case of families where one or more child is affected by attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. [10546]

Mr. Boateng: Family therapy may play a part in a comprehensive treatment programme which may also include medication and other interventions. With young children and in milder forms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, family therapy may be an appropriate and effective approach on its own, for example if focused on enhancing parenting skills and helping the child learn strategies to improve concentration.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has in association with the Department for Education and Employment to promote *(a)* awareness of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and *(b)* appropriate training for the disorder among child psychiatrists and paediatricians. [10501]

Mr. Boateng: The handbook on "Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services", which was published jointly with the Department for Education and Employment, raises awareness of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and includes references to training of professional groups involved in the treatment of young people with emotional and behavioural disorders. Copies of the handbook are available in the Library.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the relationship between attention deficit disorder and learning difficulties; and if he will make a statement. [10509]

Mr. Boateng: It has been shown that children with learning difficulties have an increased risk of a wide range of conditions, including hyperactivity. Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder in children may also impair the capacity of a child to learn.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those university teaching hospitals, medical colleges and other institutions involved in the training of medical doctors, indicating which of them include in their courses training in attention deficit disorder. [10511]

Mr. Boateng: A list of United Kingdom university teaching hospitals, UK medical schools and medical royal colleges and their faculties is attached. The detailed content of curricula is set by individual medical schools within the parameters laid down by the General Medical Council which has responsibility for determining the extent of knowledge and skill required for the granting of UK primary medical qualifications. The standard and content of postgraduate medical training is the responsibility of the appropriate royal college or faculty, which will be fully aware of the importance of attention deficit disorder in training programmes.

Specialist training of child psychiatrists includes training in the diagnosis and treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The training rotations are regularly inspected and accredited by the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

United Kingdom university medical schools

- University of Birmingham Faculty of Medicine
- University of Bristol Medical School
- University of Cambridge Faculty of Clinical Medicine
- University of Leeds School of Medicine
- University of Leicester Faculty of Medicine
- University of Liverpool School of Medicine
- University of London Medical Colleges:
    - Charing Cross and Westminster Medical School
    - King's College School of Medicine
    - St. Bartholomew's and the London School of Medicine
    - Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine
    - St. George's Hospital Medical School
    - St. Mary's Hospital Medical School
    - United Medical and Dental Schools of Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospitals
    - University College London Medical School
- University of Manchester Medical School
- University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne Faculty of Medicine
- University of Nottingham Medical School
- University of Oxford Medical School
- University of Sheffield Medical School
- University of Southampton Faculty of Medicine
- University of Wales College of Medicine
- University of Aberdeen Faculty of Medicine
- University of Dundee Faculty of Medicine
- University of Edinburgh Medical School
- University of Glasgow Faculty of Medicine
- Queen's University of Belfast Faculty of Medicine

United Kingdom university teaching hospitals

- Queen's Medical centre, Nottingham University Hospital NHS trust
- Royal Victoria Infirmary and Associated Hospitals NHS trust
- St. James's University Hospital NHS trust
- Leicester Royal Infirmary NHS trust
- Central Sheffield University Hospital NHS trust
- The Addenbrooke's NHS trust
- Southampton University Hospital NHS trust
- Oxford Radcliffe Hospital NHS trust
- United Bristol Healthcare NHS trust
- Queen Elizabeth II Hospital
- Royal Liverpool University NHS trust
- Central Manchester Healthcare NHS trust
- London Hospitals:
    - The Royal Hospitals NHS trust
    - King's Healthcare NHS trust
    - St. George's NHS trust
    - St. Mary's NHS trust
    - Hammersmith Hospitals NHS trust
    - The Royal Free Hampstead NHS trust
    - University College London Hospitals NHS trust
    - Guy's and St. Thomas's NHS trust
- University Hospital of Wales Healthcare NHS trust
- Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS trust
- Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS trust
- Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS trust
- Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS trust
- Royal Group of Hospitals and Dental Hospitals NHS trust

List of medical royal colleges and their faculties

- Royal College of Ophthalmologists
- Royal College of Anaesthetists
- Royal College of Psychiatrists
- Royal College of General Practitioners
- Royal College of Physicians
- Royal College of Surgeons
- Royal College of Pathologists
- Royal College of Radiologists
- Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology
- Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
- Royal College of Surgeons (Edinburgh)
- Royal College of Physicians (Edinburgh)
- Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons (Glasgow)
- Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland
- Faculty of Accident and Emergency Medicine (inter-collegiate faculty)
- Faculty of Dental Surgery of the Royal College of Surgeons of England
- Faculty of Occupational Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians
- Faculty of Public Health Medicine of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will examine the practice among medical practitioners of giving up the use of ritalin among children suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder after 12 months' use; and if he will make a statement. [10544]

Mr. Boateng: The use of ritalin to treat children suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a matter for professional and clinical judgment and we have no plans to examine it.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has evaluated into the increased risks resulting from ingesting *(a)* Ecstasy, *(b)* LSD and *(c)* other illegal substances while taking (i) tricyclic antidepressants, (ii) monoamine oxidase inhibitors and (iii) rifampicin; and if he will make a statement. [11017]

Ms Jowell: The Department of Health has not evaluated any research into increased risks from the ingestion of the combinations of substances specified. Should there be any emerging evidence of increased risk, we would of course consider the need to do so.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has undertaken into the number of people who have used illegal drugs in each 10-year age band; and if he will make a statement. [11018]

Ms Jowell: As part of the health education monitoring survey 1996, the Health Education Authority included items about drug misuse. This survey involved interviewing 4,645 people aged 16 to 74 living in England; only those aged 16 to 54 were asked to complete the part of the survey concerning drug misuse. Published data show the following prevalence of drug misuse reported in the survey and are reproduced in the table:

Age (years)	*Percentage ever used an illegal drug*		*Percentage used a drug in the last 12 months*		*Percentage used a drug in the last month*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
16 to 19	42	47	36	41	27	24
20 to 24	70	46	46	26	35	17
25 to 29	50	32	23	11	12	7
30 to 34	39	26	13	8	9	4
35 to 39	34	26	10	6	6	3
40 to 44	36	16	8	2	6	2
45 to 54	18	11	5	1	3	1
Total (16 to 54)	38	26	17	11	12	6

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions he has held with the pharmaceutical companies about the need to warn prescribed drug users of potentially fatal interactions between certain products and illegal drugs; [11011]

(2) What assessment he has made of the effect of ritonavir and other drugs used in the treatment of AIDS on the toxicity of methylenedioxymethamphetamine; and if he will make a statement; [11020]

(3) what plans he has to meet representatives of the medical profession to discuss the benefits of compulsory written and oral warnings for prescribed drug users of potentially fatal interactions between certain products and illegal drugs; [11019]

(4) if he will introduce measures to make it a legal requirement for pharmaceutical companies to notify officials about potentially lethal interactions between medicinal and illegal drugs; and if he will make a statement; [11010]

(5) what was his Department's expenditure on research into the possible risks of interaction between prescribed and illegal drugs in each of the last five years. [11014]

Mr. Milburn: The United Kingdom Medicines Control Agency is aware of anecdotal reports of possible interactions between ritonavir and illegal drugs, notably methylenedioxymethamphetamine—Ecstasy. Ritonavir is a centrally authorised product and so these reports will be drawn to the attention of the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products which advises the European Commission, the licensing authority for these medicines.

The MCA continuously monitors the safety of all medicines marketed in the UK. This includes monitoring for potential interactions between medicines and between medicines and other substances. Pharmaceutical companies also have a statutory responsibility for the safety of the medicines they market and to provide information on safety, quality and efficacy to the licensing authority.

It is the responsibility of doctors to give advice to their patients about medicines they prescribe. Patients should receive sufficient information, in a way that they can understand, about their treatment, the possible alternatives and any substantial risks such that a patient can make an informed decision about treatment. A doctor has to exercise his or her professional judgment in deciding what information the patient should receive.

The Department's policy research programme and the national health service research and development programme are not currently undertaking any research into the possible risks of interaction between prescribed and illegal drugs.

Corticosteroid Inhalers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of *(a)* the general population and *(b)* asthma sufferers using corticosteroid inhalers develop cataracts; and if he will make a statement; [11009]

(2) what assessment he has made of the possible link between the use of corticosteroids in asthma inhalers and the development of cataracts. [11008]

Mr Milburn: The Medicines Control Agency is aware of the recently published survey from Australia in *The New England Journal of Medicine* suggesting that cataracts may be more common among adults using inhaled corticosteroids. The scientific evidence is currently being assessed.

Cataract is a progressive disease and it is difficult to assess its incidence. However, it is primarily a disease in older people and incidence increases with age.

Dental Services

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists offered NHS treatment in each year since 1979. [10902]

Mr. Milburn: The table sets out the number of dentists on a family health services authority/health authority list at 30 September 1979 to 30 September 1996.

General Dental Service: number of dentists at 30 September from 1979 to 1996

England

Date	*Number of dentists*
1979	12,146
1980	12,415
1981	12,835
1982	13,258
1983	13,672
1984	14,066
1985	14,334
1986	14,516
1987	14,765
1988	15.070
1989	15,351
1990	15,480
1991	15,451
1992	15,411
1993	15,773
1994	15,885
1995	15,951
1996	16,366

1. Figures include principals on a FHSA/HA list and their assistants and vocational trainees.

2. Some dentists have a contract with more than one family health services authority/health authority. These dentists are counted only once.

3 Figures exclude salaried, hospital or community dentists.

Liver and Heart Transplants

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* liver and *(b)* heart transplants were carried out by the NHS in each year since 1979. [10908]

Mr. Boateng: The table shows the number of transplants performed in the NHS each year from and including 1979, excluding transplant operations performed privately in NHS hospitals.

Year	*Livers*	*Hearts*
1979	7	—
1980	7	—
1981	12	1
1982	15	—
1983	9	1
1984	32	3
1985	55	89
1986	117	175
1987	153	213
1988	214	246
1989	274	262
1990	332	287
1991	373	250
1992	465	303
1993	521	290
1994	592	302
1995	643	307
1996	606	268

Source:

United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority (UKTSSA).

Health Spending

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of gross domestic product NHS spending represented in each year since 1979. [10898]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is set out in the table.

United Kingdom national health service expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product

Year	*UK NHS expenditure as a percentage of GDP*
1978–79	4.7
1979–80	4.7
1980–81	5.3
1981–82	5.5
1982–83	5.5
1983–84	5.3
1984–85	5.4
1985–86	5.2
1986–87	5.1
1987–88	5.1
1988–89	5.1
1989–90	5.1
1990–91	5.2
1991–92	5.7
1992–93	6.0
1993–94	5.9
1994–95	5.8
1995–96	5.8
1996–97	5.7
1997–98	5.5

Gross domestic product adjusted to remove the distortion caused by the abolition of domestic rates.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the total amount of NHS spending, in cash and real terms, in each year since 1979 and *(b)* the real terms percentage change in NHS spending since 1979. [10899]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is set out in the table.

National health service (England) total gross expenditure

Year	*Cash £ million*	*Real terms (1996–97 prices) £ million*	*Percentage real growth*
1978–79	6,525	20,067	3.2
1979–80	7,755	20,435	1.8
1980–91	10,103	22,500	10.1
1981–82	11,329	23,005	2.2
1982–83	12,353	23,417	1.8
1983–84	13,114	23,757	1.5
1984–85	14,102	24,325	2.4
1985–86	14,911	24,384	0.2
1986–87	16,034	25,452	4.4
1987–88	17,642	26,589	4.5
1988–89	19,616	27,710	4.2
1989–90	21,132	27,903	0.7
1990–91	23,654	28,919	3.6
1991–92	26,786	30,783	6.4
1992–93	29,371	32,394	5.2
1993–94	30,393	32,574	0.6
1994–95	31,973	33,759	3.6
1995–96	33,473	34,398	1.9
1996–97	34,800	34,800	1.2
1997–98	35,948	34,986	0.5

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the amount of capital expenditure in the NHS, in cash and real terms, in each year since 1979. [10901]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is set out in the table.

National Health Service capital gross expenditure (England)

Year	*Cash (£ million)*	*Real terms (1996–97 prices) (£ million)*	*Percentage real growth*
1978–79	411	1,264	4.4
1979–80	462	1,217	–3.7
1980–81	627	1,396	14.7
1981–82	758	1,539	10.2
1982–83	790	1,498	–2.7
1983–84	827	1,498	0.0
1984–85	926	1,597	6.6
1985–86	1,013	1,657	3.7
1986–87	1,089	1,729	4.4
1987–88	1,129	1,702	–1.6
1988–89	1,221	1,725	1.4
1989–90	1,454	1,920	11.3
1990–91	1,604	1,961	2.2
1991–92	1,693	1,946	–0.8
1992–93	1,868	2,060	5.9
1993–94	1,807	1,937	–6.0
1994–95	2,073	2,189	13.0
1995–96	2,018	2,074	–5.3
1996–97	1,909	1,909	–8.0
1997–98	1,621	1,578	–17.3

Skin Cancer

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was his Department's total expenditure on publishing the links between exposure to the sun and skin cancer in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [11022]

Mr. Boateng: We are able to give figures for total expenditure on skin cancer publicity, including public education, since 1994. Prior to that date, any spending on skin cancer would have been included in general cancer prevention figures and cannot be separately identified.

1994–95: £673,000

1995–96: £783,000

1996–97: £930,000 (including public education campaign)

The Government are aware of the dramatic increase in the incidence of skin cancer during the 1970s and 1980s and are continuing work in raising public awareness of the dangers of excessive exposure to the sun. Our target is to halt the year-on-year increase in the incidence of skin cancer by 2005.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was his Department's expenditure on research into skin cancer in each of the last five years. [11021]

Mr. Boateng: The following amounts were spent on research into skin cancer in the last five years. The table also includes estimated figures for the years 1997–98 to 2000–01.

	£000
1992–93	10
1993–94	31
1994–95	85
1995–96	75
1996–97	331
1997–98	[1]634
1998–99	[1]784
1999–00	[1]421
2000–01	[1]50

[1] Estimates for future years.

In addition, the Department has commissioned surveys on behaviour and attitudes to the sun from the Office for National Statistics to facilitate subsequent targeting of action—£25,000 per year for the last three years.

Drugs (Genetic Defects)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the links between possible genetic defects and the poor metabolising of certain drugs; and if he will make a statement. [11012]

Mr. Milburn: A link between genetically inherited enzyme status and the metabolism of certain drugs is well known and is documented in medical literature and, for relevant drugs, in the manufacturers' product information, which is authorised by the Licensing Authority. Such an effect on drug metabolism is taken into account in the development of new drugs and in post-marketing safety monitoring by the Medicines Control Agency. Also, the Medical Research Council has on-going programmes of research in this area.

Breast Cancer (Screening)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women have been screened for breast cancer for each year since 1979. [10911]

Mr. Boateng: The breast screening programme was introduced into the national health service in 1988. The target age group is women aged 50 to 64 and the information available for this age group is shown in the table. National data have been collected only since the introduction of the national screening programme. Data for the years from 1988 to 1991 were not of sufficient quality to be published.

Year	*Number of Women screened (aged 50 to 64)*
1991–92	923,000
1992–93	945,000
1993–94	961,000
1994–95	976,000
1995–96	976,000

Source:
KC62

Young People (Independent Living)

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young people left local authority care for independent living in the year 1996–97 broken down by age and local authority. [10818]

Mr. Boateng: Information on the number of children who ceased to be looked after by each local authority in England at 31 March 1995 in table 13 of the publication "Children Looked After by Local Authorities, year ending 31 March 1995, England", copies of which are available in the Library. The corresponding figures for the year ending 31 March 1996 are due to be published in August 1997. Data for the year ending 31 March 1997 are currently being processed by the Department of Health and will be published in 1998.

Information on the accommodation of young people subsequent to them leaving local authority care is not collected centrally.

Accident and Emergency Facilities (Solihull)

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, column *560*, on accident and emergency facilities in Solihull, when the trust changed its name to Birmingham Heartlands NHS trust; what assessment he has made of the implications of this change for the provision of local 24-hour accident and emergency facilities in Solihull; and if he will make a statement. [10822]

Mr. Milburn: The reference to Birmingham Heartlands NHS trust in my previous reply was an error. The full title of the trust is Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull NHS trust (Teaching). There are therefore no implications for Solihull.

NHS Building and Modernisation Schemes

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS building or modernisation schemes costing over £1 million have been completed since 1979, broken down by *(a)* health authority, *(b)* cost, *(c)* time of completion and *(d)* nature of scheme. [10897]

Mr. Milburn: Some 944 capital schemes, each with a works cost of £1 million or over, have been completed since 1 January 1980. Details of schemes illustrated nationally and regionally will be placed in the Library. Information broken down by health authority is not available centrally.

Nurses' Incomes

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average income of nurses in cash and real terms for each year since 1979. [10905]

Mr. Milburn: Nurses receive a wide range of earnings, dependent on factors such as grade and length of service. "New Earnings Survey" information for the period is, however, shown in the table.

Average gross weekly earnings of nurses and midwives: Full-time employees on adult rates

	Cash £	Revalued to real terms at 1996 prices using retail prices index £
1979	67.8	190.5
1980	90.2	208.2
1981	102.6	211.4
1982	108.1	203.6
1983	121.8	220.5
1984	123.6	212.8
1985	134.3	216.2
1986	149.0	232.8
1987	158.4	237.4
1988	173.4	250.1
1989	222.0	296.4
1990	237.0	289.1
1991	268.0	307.2
1992	288.2	316.8
1993	290.0	314.7
1994	307.8	325.7
1995	310.9	318.4
1996	325.7	325.7

1. Information from "New Earnings Survey" analyses by collective agreements.

2. Gross weekly earnings include overtime, shift etc. premium payments and allowances.

3. Prior to 1983, adults related to men aged 21 and over or women aged 18 and over. Data prior to 1983 have been adjusted.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Press Releases

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much her Department spends on biking press releases to *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* other individuals or groups, each time her Department issues a press release; how many such press releases were issued by her Department (i) in the period 1 May to 1 July and (ii) in the period 1 January to 1 March; and if she will review her Department's use of couriers to deliver press releases and investigate the possibility of using fax or e-mail. [8817]

Mr. Paul Murphy: *(a)* Nil.

(b) It is not possible to identify costs per release; the total cost for delivery of releases in 1997–98 is estimated at £15,909.

(i) 204

(ii) 142

The use of couriers to deliver press releases is regularly reviewed and has been substantially reduced in recent years. Fax and e-mail are now used extensively and their use is currently under review. All press releases are also available on the Internet www.nio.gov.uk/press.

Northern Ireland Railways

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from how many sources application forms for employment with Northern Ireland Railways have been available in each of the past five years; and what measures are in place to ensure easy access to application forms for all sections of the Northern Ireland community. [9972]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This is a matter for Northern Ireland Railways. However, I understand from the managing director of the company that in each of the past five years application forms for employment with Northern Ireland Railways have been available from the human resources department at Northern Ireland Railways following advertisements in the press or through the Training and Employment Agency network which has offices based throughout Northern Ireland. Taken together, these two measures have ensured easy access to application forms for all sections of the Northern Ireland community.

Charities

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many services run by charities and paid for by North Down and Ards health and social services trust in 1995 were not funded in 1996; which charities were involved; and what other services were affected. [9975]

Mr. Worthington: The following charities received funding from North Down and Ards community health and social services trust in the 1995–96 financial year but not in 1996–97:

Ballyholme methodist parent and toddler group

Barnardos

Carnalea and Castle park social centre

Decisions to cease purchasing specific services are taken for a number of reasons, including the availability of alternative services more appropriate to local needs, changes in local need and cost considerations. Where changes in service providers take place, issues of quality and appropriateness remain paramount.

Information on each of the services provided by charities funded by the trust is not collected centrally within the trust and to do so would incur disproportionate costs.

Rights of the Child Convention

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if she will make a statement on the consultation process involved in the UK fulfilling the reporting requirement relating to the UN convention on the rights of the child; and if she will make a statement on the impact on UK policy of adopting the convention and the practical measures necessary to implement it; [9283]

(2) if she will make a statement on the consultation process involved in the UK fulfilling the reporting requirement relating to the UN convention on the rights of the child; and if she will make a statement on the impact on UK policy of adopting the convention and the practical measures necessary to implement it. [9243]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 23 July 1997]:* The Government submitted their first report to the UN committee on the rights of the child in 1994. A further report is to be submitted in 1999. To assist in the production of this report, the Department of Health proposes to convene a conference early in 1998 to discuss its content and format. It is likely that this conference will involve a range of organisations with an interest in children's issues, including Government Departments, representatives from the voluntary sector, local authorities and the users of services. I can confirm that the Northern Ireland Office will participate fully in the UK-wide consultation process.

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order, which commenced in November 1996, is one example of legislation which clearly reflects the principles of the UN convention. The central principles of the legislation is that the welfare of the child must be the first consideration when decisions are being made about children's lives.

The Department of Health has lead responsibility for promoting the convention and for ensuring that its principles are kept in mind when any legislation, policy or practice which will impact on children is being considered.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the RUC guidelines for the use of plastic baton rounds are a classified document; and if she will place a copy in the Library. [8276]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 July 1997]:* The RUC documents that include the guidelines on the use of plastic baton rounds are classified as confidential internal police instructions. However, with the agreement of the Chief Constable, I have placed a copy of parts of these documents in the Library. As indicated in answers to earlier questions tabled by my hon. Friend, the RUC is currently engaged with its Association of Chief Police Officers colleagues in Great Britain in reviewing those guidelines.

Sir David Fell

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what will be the total cost of the annual compensation payments made to Sir David Fell from his resignation on 1 October 1997 until his 60th birthday; and what are the grounds on which he is receiving compensation. [7720]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[pursuant to his reply, 16 July 1997, c. 218]:* I have written to the hon. and learned Gentleman further on this subject and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Bereavement Benefits

18. **Mr. Walter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the issue of gender discrimination in respect of entitlement to bereavement benefits. [9045]

Mr. Denham: Modernising the social security system is a key priority of the Government. In our examination of the current social security structure, we will take account of the needs and responsibilities of widows and widowers in pursuit of our aim of reducing poverty and welfare dependency, promoting work incentives and providing better, simpler, more efficient services to clients.

Pensions

19. **Mr. Woodward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme in 1996–97. [9046]

Mr. Denham: Our long-term objective is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to build up adequate pension to guarantee security in retirement. We will encourage secure, flexible and value-for-money second pensions.

At the end of April 1997, some 5.6 million people were contracted out of SERPS through an appropriate personal pension scheme.

In 1994–95, there were 8.2 million people contracted out of SERPS through occupational pension schemes. This is the latest year for which this information is available.

33. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations she has received about the state pension. [9061]

Mr. Denham: We have now announced the terms of a wide-ranging review. It will involve extensive consultation with interested parties, including employers, employees, the pensions industry and today's pensioners.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will restore the link between the basic pension and average earnings pending the outcome of the pensions review. [10113]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 24 July 1997]:* The review of the central areas of insecurity for elderly people announced on 17 July by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will include all aspects of the basic state pension and its value and second pensions including the state earnings-related pension scheme. As part of our consultative approach, the National Pensioners Convention will take a specific role in the review to ensure that the views of today's pensioners are heard. The review will enable the Government to publish an initial framework for change in the first part of 1998. There will then be a period of further consultation before firm proposals are developed.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much the equalisation of the state pension at age 65 years under the Pensions Act 1995 will save per annum by 2025; and how much it will have saved in total by 2025. [10842]

Mr. Denham: The savings in national insurance fund benefit expenditure arising from the equalisation of state pension age under the Pensions Act 1995 are estimated to be approximately £6 billion per annum by 2025.

The total saving in national insurance fund benefit expenditure between 2010 and 2025 arising from the equalisation of state pension age under the Pensions Act 1995 is estimated to be approximately £60 billion.

Notes:

1. The estimates are based on the "Pensions Bill 1994—Report by the Government Actuary's Department on the Financial provisions of the Bill of the National Insurance Fund", Cm 2714, and are in 1997–98 prices.

2. Estimates assume price uprating of benefits and earning limits.

3. Savings per annum are rounded to the nearest £1 billion and total savings for the period 2010 to 2025 are rounded to the nearest £10 billion.

4. The £60 billion is a cumulative, undiscounted sum.

Child Support Agency

20. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases handled by the Child Support Agency were the subject of inquiries from hon. Members in *(a)* the past 12 months and *(b)* each year since the Child Support Agency was established. [9047]

Mr. Keith Bradley: In the past 12 months, to the end of June 1997, the Child Support Agency received 17,590 letters from hon. Members concerning operational issues. We cannot relate this figure directly to the number of cases concerned.

Complete information is not available for each year since the agency's launch as in the early years only inquiries dealt with by the chief executive were recorded. In 1994–94, the chief executive received almost 5,000 letters. In the following two years, the figures were 11,000 and 10,530 respectively. In 1996–97, inquiries from hon. Members sent direct to centre managers were also recorded. In that year, 18,860 letters were received.

As I indicated when we debated child support last month, we intend to look closely at all aspects of the Child Support Agency to ensure that it provides an efficient and effective service. Our key objectives for the agency during the coming year are to sort out cases faster, tackle the backlog of cases and pursue fathers who avoid paying.

29. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she next expects to meet the chief executive of the Child Support Agency to discuss the work of the Child Support Agency. [9057]

Mr. Bradley: My noble Friend Baroness Hollis of Heigham, the Minister with day-to-day responsibilities for child support, has regular meetings with the chief executive of the Child Support Agency to discuss operational issues. We are determined to ensure that the agency delivers an improved level of service to all its clients.

Mortgage Interest Payments

23. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will change the system of benefit payments in respect of mortgage interest payments to monthly payments. [9051]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We have no plans to do so.

Lone Parents

26. **Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what will be the net saving to her Department from the removal of lone-parent entitlements to additional income support and child benefit. [9054]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The estimated net saving from the removal of entitlement for new cases to the lone-parent rates of child benefit and the family premium in income support, jobseeker's allowance and housing and council tax benefits is, in the three years starting from 1998–99, £60 million, £140 million and £195 million.

39. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on her Department's proposals to reduce dependency on benefits among lone mothers. [9067]

Mr. Bradley: We believe that work is the best form of welfare for all people of working age, including lone mothers, and that children should grow up in an environment where work is the norm, not life on benefits. Currently, over 1 million lone mothers bring up 2 million children on income support—we are determined to change this. Our new deal for lone parents will bring opportunities to those previously excluded from society and help to build a one-nation Britain.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the number of lone parents who would *(a)* be unaffected, *(b)* lose up to £2 per week, *(c)* lose £2 to £3.99 per week, *(d)* lose £4 to £5.99 per week and *(e)* lose £6 or more per week from (i) the abolition of the higher rate of child benefit paid to lone parents, (ii) the reduction of the lone-parent family premium in income support and related benefits to the same level as the family premium for two-parent families and (iii) (i) and (ii) simultaneously; and in each case if she will list the average loss for all lone parents, and the total effect on public funds. [10795]

Mr. Bradley: Removal of the lone-parent rates of child benefit and family premium for new cases will not create any cash losers because existing recipients will be protected. Some lone parents making new claims will receive less benefit than they would have done without the changes.

Information for 1998–99, the first year of the changes, is in the tables. All numbers refer to the total number affected, or not, at the end of the year. Average losses refer to the average notional loss for the lone parents who will be affected. The numbers unaffected refer only to those lone parents in receipt of social security benefits; reliable estimates of the total number of lone parents unaffected are not available.

Removal of the higher rate of child benefit for lone parents

	Child benefit
Unaffected	965,000
£0 to £2 loss	0
£2 to £3.99 loss	0
£4 to £5.99 loss	75,000
£6 + loss	0

Average notional loss: £5.85—only those affected.

Removal of higher rate of family premium in income-related benefits

	Income support	*Housing benefit*[1]	*Council tax benefit*[1]
Unaffected	800,000	150,000	125,000
£0 to £2 loss	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
£2 to £3.99 loss	Negligible	Negligible	45,000
£4 to £5.99 loss	260,000	Negligible	Negligible
£6 + loss	0	60,000	Negligible

[1] Excludes those on income support, who are covered in the income support estimate.

Notes:

1. Average notional loss:
Income support = £4.75
Housing benefit = £7.20
Council tax benefit = £2.20

2. Reliable information on the precise number losing specified amounts through the interaction of the changes in the different benefits is not available. The maximum overall notional loss will be £10.25 and applies to lone parents who are not on income support, for example, because they are in work, who are not able to claim the lone-parent rate of child benefit, but who become eligible for housing benefit and council tax benefit. The majority of those who will be able to claim the lone-parent rate of child benefit as well as housing and council tax benefit will notionally lose a maximum of £9.40. The majority of lone parents moving on to income support will lose £4.75, since the changes to other benefits will not affect them while on income support.

3. The total effect on public funds is forecast to be a saving of £60 million in 1998–99.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to what extent child benefit received by lone parents is counted as income when a claim for family credit is made. [10793]

Mr. Bradley: Child benefit is disregarded when calculating family credit. Account is taken of the level of child benefit when the family credit children's rates—the "child credits"—are set. The child credits and child benefit combined are greater than income support children's rates to provide a contribution in lieu of free school meals and welfare foods available only to children of families on income support.

Claimants (Improved Services)

27. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the Government's plans for improving services to claimants. [9055]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We want to modernise the social security system we have inherited to improve services to claimants. We want a system that is speedy, fair and efficient. The Social Security Bill laid before the House on 9 July has measures that will enable us improve the service provided to those claiming benefits.

38. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has for improving services to those making social security appeals. [9066]

Mr. Bradley: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer I gave earlier today to our hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts).

Long-term Sick and Disabled People

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total spending on benefits for the long-term sick and disabled in *(a)* 1978–79 and *(b)* 1996–97; and what change this represents in real terms. [10849]

Mr. Denham: Total spending on benefits for the long-term sick and disabled, in real terms, was £5.4 billion in 1978–79 and £22.4 billion in 1996–97.

Fraud

28. **Mr. Fabian Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the Government's proposals on fraud in the benefit system. [9056]

Mr. Denham: We are committed to modernising the structure and delivery of social security to encourage independence, social cohesion and well-being; to develop an active welfare system that supports work, savings and honesty; and to help tackle effectively unjustifiable social and economic inequalities. To that end, we are examining the major components of the system.

As part of this work, we are re-examining the strategic objectives governing counter-fraud work throughout the Department. This will ensure that there is coherence between counter-fraud objectives and other policy and operational strategic objectives, in particular those aimed at controlling loss of programme expenditure. We are also looking at the assumptions underpinning the calculation of estimated fraud savings. We will be involving external parties in discussions on these issues and inviting experts in their field to a fraud seminar to be held in September.

30. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the level of fraud in housing benefit. [9058]

Mr. Denham: We are determined to clamp down on housing benefit fraud as part of our drive to restore public confidence in a secure social security system.

Estimates of the level of housing benefit fraud vary. A 1995 survey of housing benefit accuracy estimated the level of fraud to be almost £1 billion, whereas evidence presented to the Social Security Committee in 1996 suggested the figure could be as high as £2 billion. Over the next six months, with the help of local authorities, we will conduct a further detailed study to provide an accurate and up-to-date estimate of the level of fraud and profiles of those who perpetrate it, including the extent to which unscrupulous landlords are involved in fraud. As a first step, I have written to chief executives of local authorities emphasising the importance of the study and inviting their authority to participate.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list in 1997–98 prices *(a)* the amount which the Government have saved as a result of measures to tackle benefit fraud in each year since 1978–79 and *(b)* the current projections for savings in future years. [10847]

Mr. Denham: This Government's aim is to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to build confidence and integrity into the benefit system. An important part of that is the fight against benefit fraud.

Benefit savings figures prior to 1986 are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available is given in the tables.

The projected savings figures are based on the estimates of the previous Administration, and I shall examine carefully the assumptions underpinning them.

Past savings

£ million

Year	*DSS savings £(1997–98 prices)*	*LA savings*[1] *£ (1997–98 prices)*	*Total*
1986–87	235	n/a	[1]235
1987–88	304	n/a	[1]304
1988–89	380	n/a	[1]380
1989–90	419	n/a	[1]419
1990–91	428	n/a	[1]428
1991–92	528	n/a	[1]528
1992–93	632	n/a	[1]632
1993–94	720	95	815
1994–95	778	166	944
1995–96	[2]1,290	205	1,495
1996–97	[2]1,566	[3]267	1,833

[1] No central records are kept of any local authority savings achieved prior to April 1993. Local authority figures are net of subsidy payments.

[2] Includes savings from initiatives in the security and control programme. Savings of £1,524 million at 1996–97 prices are shown in the Benefits Agency annual report and accounts, HC78, published on 22 July 1997.

[3] Local authority savings are provisional and subject to audit.

1. Figures have been converted to 1997–98 prices using the adjusted GDP deflator at market prices.

2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest £1 million.

3. The information is given in terms of weekly benefit savings deriving from activity in the given year, not public expenditure savings which could be accounted for in that year. Weekly benefit savings are calculated by taking the difference between the amount incorrectly paid to an individual and the correct amount of benefit due, following intervention of the fraud officer. This amount is multiplied by 32. Based on research which mainly covered income support, 32 weeks is the average length of time a claim would have continued if the fraud had not been detected. This multiplier is currently applied to all benefits.

Future projections

£ million

Year	*DSS savings £ (1997–98 prices)*	*LA savings*[1] *£ (1997–98 prices)*	*Total*
1997–98	1,585	280	1,865
1998–99	1,927	309	2,236
1999–00	1,938	274	2,212

[1] Local authority figures are net of estimated subsidy payments.

Notes:

1. The savings figures are estimates and have been calculated on a different basis to past savings. Estimates weekly benefit savings figures have been adjusted so that the savings are counted in the year when they actually occur to align more closely with the public expenditure process.

Benefits Agency (Wales)

31. **Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has for the reorganisation of the Benefits Agency office network in Wales. [9059]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to our hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Mr. Ruane) on 24 July, *Official Report,* columns *748–49.*

Sickness Benefits

32. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations she has received regarding the amendment of the regulations on the qualifications for payment of sickness benefits; and if she will make a statement. [9060]

Mr. Denham: I have received a number of representations about the incapacity benefit all work test from groups representing disabled people, other interested organisations and individuals affected. The issues raised will help enable me to consider what changes are necessary to ensure that the test provides a fair assessment of a person's incapacity for work for benefit purposes.

Welfare to Work

35. **Mr. Forth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on her plans to return lone mothers from welfare to work. [9063]

34. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how she intends to assist the return of lone mothers from welfare to work. [9062]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The new deal for lone parents offers help to every lone parent with school-age children to get off benefit and into work so they can provide a better life for themselves and their children. From October 1998, each lone parent will be invited into the jobcentre and, with the help of her own personal adviser, she will develop job search skills, receive training and find child care to help her into work. The new deal for lone parents began in eight parts of the country last Monday.

Compensation Recovery Scheme

36. **Mr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the average sum of money clawed back by the compensation recovery unit in each of the last four years under the Social Security (Recovery of Payments) Act 1997. [9064]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997 comes into force on 6 October 1997. From then on, the onus for refunding benefits paid in consequence of an accident, injury or disease will rest with the compensator, but he may not do so from any part of the payment intended for pain and suffering.

The current compensation recovery scheme was introduced under the Social Security Act 1989 and was later administered under the Social Security Administration Act 1992. The amounts recovered in each of the last four years are as follows:

Year	*Amount recovered £ million*
1996–97	145.50
1995–96	135.10
1994–95	110.10
1993–94	81.90

Jobseeker's Allowance

37. **Mr. Hammond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans her Department has to guarantee that nobody will have to wait more than three days before receiving the first payment of the jobseeker's allowance. [9065]

Mr. Keith Bradley: As announced on 2 July, we will proceed with the previous Government's decision that the number of waiting days before jobseeker's allowance becomes payable will be increased from three days to seven from April 1999.

However, we also announced a change in the way claims are paid to ensure that the maximum period anyone will have to wait before benefit becomes payable is no longer than at present.

The Government believe that work is the best form of welfare for people of working age. Our welfare-to-work objectives are to provide work incentives, reduce poverty and welfare dependency and strike a new balance between responsibilities and rights. A programme of monitoring and evaluation is under way to enable us to ensure that the jobseeker's allowance contributes to achieving our objectives. We shall also keep the individual benefit rules under active consideration as we develop our welfare-to-work plans.

Unclaimed Benefits

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is her current estimate of *(a)* the numbers of persons eligible for benefit who do not take up their entitlement and *(b)* the total value of unclaimed benefits. [9044]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Our pensions review will examine the central areas of insecurity for today's pensioners, one in four of whom have to rely on income support or, even worse, fail to receive it.

Our latest estimate is that around one in five people eligible for up to £3.5 billion in income-related benefits do not claim. We are particularly concerned about the position of up to 1 million pensioners not claiming their apparent income support entitlement and we are commissioning research to find out why.

Pensioners

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners were counted among the poorest 10 per cent. of the population in each year since 1978. [10843]

Mr. Denham: We believe that all pensioners should share fairly in the increasing prosperity of the nation. Our first task in the review of pensions will be to reach a consensus on the long term and avoid the twists and turns in pensions policy we have seen in the last 20 years.

Information is available for the lowest decile of the income distribution for the years shown in the table:

Per cent.

Year	*Before housing costs*	*After housing cost*
1979	22	19
1981	12	9
1987	12	8
1988–89	14	8
1990–91	12	6
1991–92	11	5

Per cent.

Year	*Before housing costs*	*After housing cost*
1992–93	9	5
1993–94	9	4

Notes:

1. For 1988–89 to 1992–93 the information is provided for two calendar years combined; 1993–94 represents the financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95 combined.

2. The reply provides information for those in the bottom decile of the income distribution but these people may not be the poorest under other definitions.

Source:

Households below average income.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the real terms increase in average incomes of pensioners before housing costs between 1979 and the most recent year for which figures are available; and how this compares with the increase in incomes for the population as a whole. [10841]

Mr. Denham: We believe that all pensioners should share fairly in rising national prosperity and that public finances should be both sustainable and affordable. We are examining the means of delivering more automatic help to the poorest pensioners.

Between 1979 and 1993–94, the average income of pensioners, before housing costs, rose by around 47 per cent. in real terms compared with a rise of 39 per cent. for the population as a whole.

Source:

Households below average income datasets; 1993–94 is the latest period for which data are available. Figures for 1993–94 are for two financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95 combined; figures for 1979 are based on a single calendar year.

Note:

Pensioners have been defined as benefit units headed by a single adult of state pension age or over and benefit units headed by a couple where the man is of state pension age or over.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of pensioners retired in *(a)* 1978–79 and *(b)* the most recent year for which figures are available presently have incomes other than state benefits. [10846]

Mr. Denham: The available information is contained in table 8 of "The Pensioners' Incomes Series 1994–95", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Child Care Costs

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families receiving family credit have an allowed claim for child care costs. [10912]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The latest figures available, as at February 1997, show there were 34,000 families receiving family credit with an allowed claim for child care costs in Great Britain.

Source:

Family credit statistics quarterly inquiry, February 1997.

Ms Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many families are receiving less than 70 per cent. of their allowed child care costs because they are at maximum family credit levels; [10913]

(2) how many families in receipt of maximum family credit have an allowed claim for child care costs. [10914]

Mr. Bradley: As at February 1997, the latest date for which information is available, 14,000 families were in receipt of maximum family credit with an allowed claim for child care costs—receiving less than 70 per cent. of their allowed child care costs.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

2. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and as such are subject to a degree of sampling error.

Source:

Family credit statistics quarterly inquiry February 1997.

Home Responsibility Payments

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the arrangements for recording entitlement to home responsibility payments for those in receipt of child benefit, in order to determine their future pension entitlement. [10311]

Mr. Denham: Awards of child benefit are notified automatically to the DSS national insurance recording system computer. The benefit calculation in NIRS takes account of awards when determining the rate of basic retirement pension to which the individual is entitled to on reaching state pension age.

Low-Income Households

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was *(a)* the average annual change in real incomes for people in the bottom income decile in each year since 1978–9 and *(b)* the cumulative change in real incomes for people in the bottom income decile since 1978–79. [10845]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

The average change (between the years available) in real incomes for people in the bottom decile since 1979

Year	*Before housing costs*	*After housing costs*
1979–1981	–2	–4
1981–1987	7	0
1987–1988–89	–2	–3
1988–89 to 1990–91	–4	–8
1990–91 to 1991–92	1	–4
1991–92 to 1992–93	1	–1
1992–93 to 1993–94	5	6

The cumulative change in real incomes for people in the bottom decile since 1979

Per cent.

Year	*Before housing costs*	*After housing costs*
1979–1981	–2	–4
1979–1987	5	–4
1979 to 1988–89	2	–6
1979 to 1990–91	–1	–14
1979 to 1991–92	0	–17

The cumulative change in real incomes for people in the bottom decile since 1979

Per cent.

Year	*Before housing costs*	*After housing costs*
1979 to 1992–93	0	−18
1979 to 1993–94	6	−13

Source:

Households below average income.

Notes:

1. For 1988–89 to 1992–93 the information is provided for two calendar years combined; 1993–94 represents the financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95 combined.

2. The survey does not track the same people over time and those at the bottom of the income distribution in one year are not the same people as in another year.

3. Small changes in estimates from year to year, particularly at the bottom of the income distribution, may not be significant in view of data uncertainties.

Care and Mobility Assistance

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people received Government help with their care or mobility needs in *(a)* 1978–79 and *(b)* 1996–97. [10848]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table. This relates solely to help provided through social security benefits.

Thousands

Benefit	*December 1979*	*May 1997*
Attendance allowance	[1]269	[2]1,174
Mobility allowance	[3]113	—
Disability living allowance	—	[2]1,885

Thousands

Benefit	*December 1979*	*June 1997*
Constant attendance allowance	6	5
War pensions mobility supplement	—	22

[1] Source: Estimated from a 100 per cent. count of statistical records adjusted to reflect estimates of the extent to which they overstate the number of live cases.

[2] Source: 5 per cent. sample.

[3] Source: 100 per cent. count. Figure does not include 24,000 awards of mobility allowance current under the Vehicle Scheme Beneficiaries Regulations 1977, formerly special mobility allowance.

Notes:

1. Disability living allowance was introduced in April 1992. It replaced and considerably extended the help that was given by attendance allowance for people disabled before the age of 65, and mobility allowance.

2. War pensioners mobility supplement was not introduced until 1983.

3. In addition, care and mobility needs may also be met through the disability and higher pensioner premiums payable with income-related benefits.

Expenditure Plans

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what rate of real increase in earnings is assumed in her Department's expenditure plans. [10569]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* I have been asked to reply.

Departments stuck to the cash totals previously agreed for expenditure within the control total. Therefore, no earnings assumption was required in the July Budget.

Private Pension Funds

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the total value of private pension funds in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* France, *(d)* Italy, and *(e)* the EU as a whole. [10844]

Mr. Denham: The Government are committed to supporting and strengthening the framework for occupational pensions and to create a new framework of secure, flexible and value-for-money second-tier pensions for those who do not have the opportunity of contributing to a second pension either because they lack the resources or because they do not have access to a decent second scheme.

The available information is shown in the table. The information shown is for the most recent year available.

	Estimated total value of private pension funds (£ billion)	*Year*
United Kingdom	750	1995
Germany	195	1994
France	35	1992
Italy	5	1991
European Union	1,270	—

Notes:

1. The United Kingdom estimate was produced by the Government Actuary's Department on behalf of the Association of British Insurers using information from the Office for National Statistics and the Department of Trade and Industry.

2. The estimates for other EU countries are based on data from "Supplementary Pensions in the European Union" published by the European Commission and "International Benefits Information Service" bulletin, April 1996.

3. The estimates for the EU as a whole contains estimates of individual countries at different periods of time and so should be viewed solely as an indication of the likely order of magnitude.

4. All estimates are rounded to the nearest £5 billion.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates she has made of the amount that changes to benefit rules for asylum seekers introduced in the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 will save in each of the next five years. [10884]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are committed to a wide-ranging review of social security. With the Home Office, the Department of Health and other Departments, we will consider all arrangements for asylum seekers to ensure they are dealt with fairly and promptly.

The information requested is in the table:

£ million

Financial year	*Estimated savings across all Benefits*
1997-98	275
1998-99	310

	£ million
Financial year	*Estimated savings across all Benefits*
1999-00	320
2000-01	330
2001-02	340

Social Fund

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many reviews of discretionary social fund payments were undertaken by the independent review service in the last year; and in how many cases the original decision was upheld. [10916]

Mr. Keith Bradley: In 1996–97, social fund inspectors reviewed 27,121 cases. In 16,756 cases, the decision of the social fund officer was confirmed.

Further information on reviews undertaken by the independent review service in 1996–97 is contained in the social fund commissioner's annual report on the standard of social fund inspectors' decisions, published on 17 July 1997. A copy is available in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 29 July 1997

PRIME MINISTER

Data Protection

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will require *(a)* MI5, *(b)* MI6 and *(c)* GCHQ to register under the Data Protection Act 1984. [10686]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* The Government are considering this matter.

Joint Consultative Cabinet Committee

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Prime Minister if he will define the terms of reference of the new Joint Consultative Cabinet Committee. [10580]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* Terms of reference will be announced to the House in due course.

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Prime Minister what are the precedents for the new Joint Consultative Cabinet Committee; what will be its membership; who will provide the secretariat; what charge it will make on public funds; how often it will meet; to whom it will report, and at what intervals; and if he intends that it should serve for the duration of this Parliament. [10582]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* There are several precedents for the new Committee, including the 1931 Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence. A later example was the Sub-Committee on Air Defence Research (1935–37). The membership of the Committee will be announced in due course. The secretariat will be provided by the Cabinet Secretariat. Costs related to the Committee are expected to be small and will be met from existing resources. The Committee will meet on a regular basis and, like other Cabinet Committees, its deliberations will be reported to Cabinet as necessary. I expect it to continue indefinitely.

Yemen

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on UK–Yemen relations. [11339]

The Prime Minister: We enjoy good relations with the Yemen. At their meeting in London on 17 July, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed with the Yemeni Foreign Minister ways in which we might improve co-operation between our two countries.

Ministers (Complaints about the Media)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions since 2 May on which Ministers or persons acting on behalf of Ministers have complained to the media about the reporting of the Government's activities, indicating in each case the name of the Minister or person concerned. [10779]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* No central record exists.

Minister without Portfolio

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what account was taken of the relative priority of the responsibilities of the Minister without Portfolio for *(a)* Labour party and *(b)* Government matters in calculating his remuneration from public funds. [10774]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Account was taken only of his responsibilities within the Government.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the meetings and events since 2 May at which the Minister without Portfolio has represented the Government. [10780]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Since 2 May my hon. Friend has had a wide range of meetings with ministerial colleagues and others.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the Adjournment debate on Wednesday 23 July, *Official Report,* columns *994–1022,* whether he will ask a Scottish Lord Justice of Appeal in Ordinary to consider the validity or otherwise of the Crown Office information concerning two Libyans connected with the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, and report to him. [11073]

The Prime Minister: No. Consideration of the evidence in a criminal case is a matter within the exclusive jurisdiction of my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to ensure that animals exported from the United Kingdom receive *(a)* the mid-journey break and *(b)* the 24-hour break, required by directive 95/92/EC, after they have left the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [10280]

Mr. Morley: Enforcement of the rest period requirements of EU directive 95/29 is the responsibility of the authorities of the member state in which a rest is required to take place. For our own part, the Government will not hesitate to use the sanctions provided by the directive against transporters who are shown to have made false declarations about the journeys they have undertaken.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the animal welfare implications of importing exotic animals into the United Kingdom for commercial purposes; and if he will make a statement. [10788]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* This Government give high priority to the welfare of all animals, whatever their origin.

The Protection of Animals Act 1911 protects domestic and captive animals from cruelty. Exotic animals kept for farming purposes are further protected by the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 which makes it an offence to cause or allow unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress. The keeping of certain exotic species is also subject to the licensing requirements of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976.

Calf Slaughter Scheme

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to the Commission on ending the current calf slaughter scheme. [11323]

Mr. Rooker: The UK has made a number of representations to the Commission about the future operation of the calf processing aid scheme and the early marketing scheme for veal, which were introduced by the Commission with the objective of reducing beef production. Under EU law, member states are obliged to operate one or both of the schemes. In May, the Commission undertook to provide the Council of Agriculture Ministers with a further report on the effectiveness of both schemes in the light of experience. I understand that the report is likely to be submitted to the Council of Agriculture Ministers in September.

Regional Panels

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what method of communicating with farmers will be adopted by his Department to replace the regional panels. [11333]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) on 25 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *540*.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to the European Commission on increased flexibility on non-food crops to be grown on set-aside land which qualifies for integrated administration and control system, IACS, payments. [11334]

Mr. Rooker: A wide range of crops may be grown on set-aside land for specific non-food uses. The European Commission has recently amended the detailed rules which apply to this aspect of the arable area payments scheme to make them more flexible in some respects. The Commission regulation concerned is expected to be published shortly and interested parties have been advised of the changes to the rules.

Cattle Slaughter Scheme

Mr. Curry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of *(a)* the backlog of cattle awaiting slaughter under the over-30-months scheme as a result of the reduction in the number of designated abattoirs and *(b)* the total loss to farmers through being unable to get cattle slaughtered before the new price and weight regime applies in August. [11252]

Dr. John Cunningham: There is no backlog of over-30-months scheme cattle awaiting slaughter as a result of the reduction in the number of abattoirs. In the months of July and August, around 15,000 over-30-months cattle are normally slaughtered each week, and the Intervention Board has made available the capacity to handle 16,000 OTMS cattle a week in the scheme abattoirs.

The reduction in the rate of compensation and the introduction of a weight limit, which are effective from 4 August, has resulted in significantly increased demand for the scheme because some farmers have brought forward their cull plans to try and benefit from the existing compensation arrangements. The Intervention Board has increased the amount of scheme slaughtering capacity by around 20 per cent. in the two weeks immediately preceding the rate change to assist producers, and has also issued instructions to scheme abattoirs to ensure, as far as possible, that producers are treated equitably and fairly. It is inevitable that some producers will be disappointed, but it would have been self-defeating for the Government to support a reduction in the scheme rate, and at the same time, take steps to minimise the number of cattle adversely affected by it.

The effect of the change in the scheme rate and the introduction of a weight restriction will reduce the return for a dairy cow weighting 560 kg by around £40, and for a suckler cow weighing 620 kg by around £80.

Mr. Curry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many abattoirs are authorised in England and Wales to carry out slaughtering of cattle under the over-30-months scheme; and if he will list the abattoirs which charge for haulage and the amounts charged in each case. [11246]

Dr. Cunningham: Following a recent tender, the Intervention Board has let contracts to 22 abattoirs in England and Wales to slaughter animals under the over-30-months scheme. The contracted abattoirs collectively carry more than sufficient capacity for the number of animals expected to enter the scheme, with reserve capacity available to deal with seasonal fluctuations.

The fee paid to the abattoirs covers the slaughter and subsequent dressing of the animals to the agency's specification, and the administration costs involved in handling OTMS animals. It does not include the cost of transporting cattle to the point of slaughter, which remains the responsibility of the farmer. Most abattoirs provide a chargeable service, on request.

Information about these charges is currently being collated as part of the contract process and the chief executive of the Intervention Board will write to the right hon. Member shortly to provide the information requested.

Tuberculosis

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to announce the outcome of the Krebs inquiry. [11123]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) on 17 July, *Official Report*, column *277*.

Veterinary Laboratories Agency

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the annual report and accounts for the Veterinary Laboratories Agency is due to be published. [11624]

Mr. Rooker: The Veterinary Laboratories Agency's annual report and accounts was published on 29 July 1997. Copies are available in the Library of the House. The report demonstrates the continuing progress and success of the organisation as a next steps agency.

Civil Servants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many civil servants there are on each pay band in his Department. [8969]

Mr. Morley: In the Department, only staff in the senior civil service are currently paid within pay bands. The number of SCS staff in each pay band is as follows:

Pay band number	*Number of core maff senior civil service staff*	*Total including agencies senior civil service staff*
1	26	31
2	32	37
3	8	9
4	7	11
5	4	5
6	6	8
7	1	1
8	2	2
9	0	0
Permanent secretary	1	1

The pay for other staff in MAFF and the Pesticides Safety Directorate is currently determined by reference to 195 pay ranges and pay spines for individual grades. These are to be rationalised into 13 main pay ranges as part of the Department's 1997 pay offer, which has yet to be agreed.

As pay and grading arrangements are different in the other MAFF agencies, I have asked the chief executives of the agencies to reply direct about their staff other than SCS staff.

Letter from P. I. Stanley to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 29 July 1997:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Central Science Laboratory (CSL), to your question concerning the number of civil servants there are on each payband.

Excluding the Senior Civil Service, to which a separate reply has been given, the numbers of staff in CSL who fall into each of the CSL paybands is as follows:

Payband number	*Number of staff*
CSL Level 1	217
CSL Level 2	273
CSL Level 3	66
CSL Level 4	36
CSL Level 5	17

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 29 July 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about the number of Civil Servants in each pay band.

The details of those members of VLA who are in the Senior Civil Service have already been given in the response to your original PQ.

VLA currently has 30 grades and details of the numbers of staff in each grade are attached. These grades will be rationalised into seven main pay bands shortly as part of the Review of Pay and Grading undertaken at VLA.

Number of VLA staff by grade

Grade	*Number*
Grade 6	11
Grade 7	13
Senior Research Officer II (SROII)	12
Senior Veterinary Investigation Officer (SVIO)	14
Veterinary Research Officer (VRO)	25
Veterinary Investigation Officer (VIO)	45
Senior Scientific Officer (SSO)	46
Senior Executive Officer (SEO)	7
Senior Librarian (S. Lib)	1
Farm Manager (FM)	1
Higher Scientific Office (HSO)	67
Higher Executive Officer (HEO)	9
Librarian (Lib)	1
Higher Photographic Officer (HPO)	1
Deputy Farm Manager (DFM)	1
Scientific Officer (SO)	126
Executive Officer (EO)	27
Stores Officer Grade D (SOG.D)	1
Assistant Librarian (ALib)	1
Photographic Officer (PO)	1
Process and General Supervisory Grade "D"	7
Typing Manager (TM)	1
Assistant Scientific Officer (ASO)	260
Administrative Officer (AO)	55
Personal Secretary (PS)	7
Support Grade Band 1 (SGB1)	36
Process and General Supervisory Grade "E"	1
Administrative Assistant (AA)	89
Typist (Typ)	34
Support Grade Band 2 (SGB2)	158
Total	1,058

Figures include permanent and casual staff at 18 July 1997.

Letter from J. M. Rutter to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 29 July 1997:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about the number of civil servants on each payband in his Department, insofar as it relates to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), which is a Next Steps Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

As the Minister explained in his reply, only staff in the Senior Civil Service (SCS) are paid on paybands. The VMD employs two SCS Staff in payband 1, and one in payband 4. These three staff were included in the Minister's reply.

The pay for all other VMD staff is currently determined by reference to the same pay ranges and pay spines used within core-MAFF. These will be rationalised in line with the Department's 1997 pay offer, which has yet to be agreed.

Letter from P. J. C. Holden to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 29 July 1997:

I am replying on behalf of the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA) and its Chief Executive who is absent from the office on leave.

The Parliamentary Secretary (Commons) has asked Chief Executives to reply to your question about how many civil servants, other than Senior Civil Service (SCS) staff there are on paybands in

MAFF Agencies. I can confirm that like core-MAFF only SCS staff in FRCA are currently defined within paybands. The remainder of the Agency's staff are currently paid within 22 pay ranges.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 29 July 1997:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) your Parliamentary Question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food enquiring how many civil servants there are on each pay band has been passed to me to reply; with regard to this Executive Agency.

As you may be aware the MHS was established on 1 April 1995 as an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF). It took over responsibility from local authorities for enforcing meat hygiene, inspection and animal welfare at slaughter legislation in licensed fresh meat premises in England, Scotland and Wales.

The MHS employs over 1,000 meat inspection and veterinary staff. The majority of these staff transferred to the MHS from local authorities under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Legislation. The MHS does not have paybands equivalent to those in the Civil Service. I therefore list below the number of staff employed by the MHS according to various salary bands. This also includes the administrative and management staff of the Agency.

Salary band	*Number of MHS staff*
£0–5,000	[1]259
£5,001–10,000	52
£10,001–15,000	618
£15,001–20,000	467
£20,001–25,000	31
£25,001–30,000	11
£30,001–35,000	16
£35,001–40,000	6
£40,000+	8

[1] This includes casual staff.

I hope that this is helpful.

Letter from P. W. Greig-Smith to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 29 July 1997:

I refer to your Parliamentary Question to the Minister.

I have been asked to reply separately concerning the staff in this Executive Agency who are not in the Senior Civil Service.

Apart from the two members of the Senior Civil Service, staff rates of pay are determined by pay ranges and spines relating to grades. Details of the numbers of staff and the pay for the grades are enclosed with this letter.

CEFAS grades and salary bands

Current grade/science group	*Total*	*Salary* *Minimum (£)*	*Maximum (£)*
Grade 6	10	28,975	49,474
Grade 7	32	25,392	40,268
Senior executive officer	1	19,215	26,200
Senior scientific officer	52	16,650	30,706
Higher executive officer	3	15,363	21,377
Higher professional and technical officer	1	13,491	24,266
Librarian	1	13,491	24,266
Higher scientific officer	58	13,491	24,266
Professional and technical officer	5	11,606	20,741
Graphics officer	1	11,606	20,471
Scientific officer	73	11,606	20,741
Technical grade 1	2	10,977	18,439
Assistance scientific officer	51	9,723	18,439
Support grade band 1	1	9,621	11,731
Executive officer	14	9,229	17,090
Personal secretary	3	9,287	13,046
Administrative officer	35	7,988	12,613
Shore industrial	26	7,825	9,531
Support grade band 2	7	7,685	10,596
Typist	9	7,247	10,650
Administrative assistant	16	6,304	10,650
Marine staff			
Marine superintendent	1	28,975	49,474
Master	4	30,903	38,544
Chief engineer	3	28,572	35,676
1st officer	4	23,299	26,750
Senior fishing mate	3	23,299	26,750
2nd engineer	1	21,921	25,335
Junior fishing mate	2	20,540	23,342
Chief steward	2	188.03	[1]210.79
Cook/steward	2	165.19	[1]188.03
Leading hand	2	165.19	[1]188.03
3rd engineer	2	165.19	[1]188.03
4th engineer	1	160.02	[1]160.2
Deck hand	10	145.93	[1]151.66
Assistant cook	1	145.93	[1]151.66
Assistant steward	1	145.93	[1]151.66
Total	442		

[1] Weekly pay.

Cattle Carcase Incineration Sites (Kent)

Mr. Green: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many proposals he has been notified of for cattle carcase incineration sites in Kent. [10357]

Mr. Rooker: The Intervention Board, which administers the over-30-months slaughter scheme, has issued one letter of intent for cattle carcase incineration in Kent following a tender [illegible] autumn. Contracts will depend on the operators obtaining all necessary licences and consents.

Four bids for cattle carcase incineration in Kent have been received under a subsequent tender which is at evaluation stage.

Food Advisory Committee

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the members of *(a)* the Food Advisory Committee and *(b)* the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, indicating the qualifications for membership and the relevant remunerated interests of each member. [10516]

Mr. Rooker: Both the Food Advisory Committee and the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, which is appointed by the chief medical officer, publish annual reports which give information on the wide range of work carried out during the year. These reports contain details of the committees' full membership and list the relevant remunerated interests of each member. Copies of the committees' most recent reports are available in the Library of the House.

Beef Imports

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he plans to lay the statutory instruments to give powers to exclude European beef from sale in this country, if it has not been processed with specified bovine material removed. [11322]

Mr. Rooker: At the July Agriculture Council, a simple majority of member states supported Commission proposals for EU-wide controls on specified materials from cattle, sheep and goats. As a result, the way is now clear for the Commission, acting on its own competence, to adopt the measure which will come into force on 1 January. It is therefore no longer necessary for the UK to introduce any unilateral measures in this area as all European beef will be subject to rigorous controls similar to those that we already have in the UK.

Halal Slaughter (Poultry)

Mr. Curry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what estimate he has made of the number of poultry slaughtered according to halal tradition other than in licensed premises in the United Kingdom; and what assessment he has made of the health risk associated with unregulated slaughter; [11254]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of poultry being slaughtered by halal traditional methods in the United Kingdom. [11253]

Dr. John Cunningham: Data are not held separately for poultry slaughtered by traditional halal methods.

I am concerned about the possible health risks associated with the production of poultry meat in unlicensed premises. That is why we have undertaken a review of the exemptions under the Poultry Meat, Farmed Game Bird Meat and Rabbit Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995, as announced on 19 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *443*.

Mr. Curry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to meet representatives of the Halal Food Authority to discuss poultry slaughter methods. [11245]

Dr. Cunningham: The Halal Food Authority wrote to me on 3 June about, among other things, the law as it relates to slaughter by the halal method. It has been invited to set out in more detail the nature of its concerns.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–00; and if he will make a statement. [11383]

Mr. Morley: Total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work is as follows:

(a) 1995–96: £35,150,000

(b) 1996–97: £39,260,000

The estimate of future years expenditure is as follows:

(c) 1997–98: £34,425,000

(d) 1998–99: £26,027,000

(e) 1999–00: £25,765,000

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what have been the savings to the United Kingdom per capita as a result of reforms to the CAP during the past three years. [11238]

Mr. Rooker: There have been no reforms to the CAP during the past three years which were designed to reduce budgetary expenditure. However, reforms to the rice regime in 1995 and to the fruit and vegetables regime in 1996 will progressively reduce price support, with consequent benefits for consumers.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Gazumping

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans his Department has to outlaw the practice of gazumping in the property market. [10240]

Mr. Hoon: We are determined to tackle the problems of gazumping and gazundering. Work is in hand across a number of Departments, steered at ministerial level, to improve the home-buying process generally, and specifically to address the issue of gazumping. This work will lead to detailed proposals which will be in the interests of everyone involved in the sale and purchase of homes.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Indonesia (Arms Exports)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Attorney-General if he will publish his legal opinion in the case of arms exports to Indonesia. [11079]

The Attorney-General: It is the established convention that the advice of the Law Officers is not disclosed, nor whether they have advised on a given question.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10741]

The Attorney-General: The personnel branch of the Treasury Solicitor's Department handles the payroll for that Department and for the legal secretariat to the Law Officers. It calculates the pay entitlement of staff including basic pay, allowances, overtime, voluntary deductions and deductions under court orders. Payments are made by Chessington Computer Services Ltd. which also processes statutory deductions and the deductions of properly authorised trade union subscriptions.

Similar functions are carried out for the Crown Prosecution Service, the Serious Fraud Office and the Government Property Lawyers by those departments' pay sections and by Chessington.

The standard payroll input and retrieval system—SPIRE—is used.

Payments to Chessington for payroll services and approximate in-house staff costs in the financial year 1996–97 were as follows (in £000):

	Chessington	*In-house costs*
Treasury Solicitor's Department	20.4	38.2
Legal Secretariat	1.7	[1]—
Crown Prosecution Service	380	415
Serious Fraud Office	20.5	33.1
Government Property Lawyers	6.9	18.9

[1] Included in figure for Treasury Solicitor's Department.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Dining Room

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the President of the Council for what reasons the hot and cold buffet was not available in the Members' Dining Room on Thursday 24 July; and who was responsible for this decision. [11198]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: This is a matter for the Catering Committee once it is set up.

HEALTH

Hospital Procedures

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collates on costs per hospital procedure in each trust. [10420]

Mr. Milburn: A limited amount of information is available on average specialty costs but this is not attributable to individual procedures or individual trusts.

Information on the prices of extra-contractual referrals has been collated at regional level for several years and is available on a trust by trust basis from the relevant regional office. The current year—1997–98—is the first year that this information has been collected nationally. The prices for surgical activity are based on costed health care resource groups—HRGs—which are a way of categorising patient treatments below specialty level. Each HRG contains a set of treatments that are clinically similar and should use roughly the same level of resources.

Extra-contractual referrals account for a small percentage of the overall activity of the national health service. These prices do not necessarily reflect the costs of activity provided through purchaser/provider agreements. In general, it is expected that ECR costs would be higher.

On occasions, procedure-based information is requested on a sample basis, to support specific initiatives.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department has collated in respect of individual trusts' plans for hospital waiting times. [10421]

Mr. Milburn: Information is not collated by the Department on individual trusts' plans for hospital waiting times. The Government have inherited a situation where 39 of 100 health authorities have contracted for longer maximum waiting times in 1997–98 than in 1996–97, whereas only three have contracted for shorter maximum waiting times. The Government have made clear the priority they attach to waiting lists, and to safeguarding emergency admissions.

Medical Negligence

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what date the national health litigation authority has compiled on medical negligence cases and claims. [10411]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service Litigation Authority holds data on all cases reported to it in respect of the clinical negligence scheme for trusts and on cases falling within the existing liabilities scheme where approval has been sought from the authority to settle claims. The information is principally concerned with the handling of claims, but the authority has commissioned work to provide a comprehensive database system which will contain individual claims by type, size and level of legal costs.

NHS Employees (Contracts)

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide a breakdown by NHS trust of the number of NHS employees who have employment contracts with waiver clauses. [10591]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not collected. The specific terms and conditions of individual employment contracts of staff working in national health service trusts are negotiated by the employer and the employee. NHS trusts have the power to offer local terms and conditions to new staff and to existing staff employed under General Whitley Council national terms and conditions. General and senior managers with short-term rolling contracts are excluded from the redundancy and premature retirement provisions in General Whitley Council agreements.

Clinical Services

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on which services are to be defined as clinical services in respect of proposed private finance initiative schemes. [10482]

Mr. Milburn: As part of the review of the private finance initiative, we will be considering what services may be included in PFI projects and are aiming to produce a list of these by the end of the year.

Community Unit (Knaresborough)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that the community unit for the elderly in Knaresborough is built without further delay; and on what date it will be completed. [10472]

Mr. Boateng: The national health service executive is maintaining close contact with Harrogate Health Care national health service trust about the Knaresborough community unit for the elderly. Work on site is expected to begin in August, with completion in June 1998. It is expected that the unit will open in summer 1998.

Hyperkinetic Disorder

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the number of children identified as suffering from hyperkinetic disorder; and what percentage this is of his estimate of the total number of persons suffering from this disorder. [10549]

Mr. Boateng: Information on the number of children identified as suffering from hyperkinetic disorder is not collected centrally.

Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the 10th annual report of the committee for monitoring agreements on tobacco advertising and sponsorship. [11517]

Ms Jowell: Shortly. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's latest assessment of the effectiveness of dopamine-releasing agents with special reference to Ritalin, in the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; if he will assess the use currently made of such treatment in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement. [10550]

Mr. Boateng: We recognise that the more severe forms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder can be treated with Ritalin or other appropriate medication. Such medication should be part of a comprehensive treatment programme which may also include psychological, educational and social measures designed to stabilise children with the condition. There is a widespread view among clinicians in this country that a higher percentage of such children are treated with medication in the United States than is desirable or necessary.

Skin Transplants

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards *(a)* the establishment of a national skin bank and *(b)* the inclusion of skin on donor cards. [10765]

Mr. Boateng: Recent research has shown that most people do not like the idea of putting "skin", "bone" or other specified tissues—as distinct from internal organs—on the donor card or national health service organ donor register form because of fears about disfigurement of the body. However, we are very much aware that in the sensitive area of transplantation approaches to donation must command public confidence. We shall continue to review all aspects of organ and tissue donation to see how improvements in supply may be achieved.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–00; and if he will make a statement. [11380]

Ms Jowell: The estimated total expenditure on computer-related current and capital work in the Department of Health headquarters and its agencies for the years requested is as follows:

(a) £39,044,000

(b) £29,559,000

(c) £29,606,000

(d) £29,449,000

(e) £30,355,000

Beta Interferon

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued to health authorities on the use of beta interferon for multiple sclerosis sufferers. [11113]

Mr. Milburn: Management guidance—executive letter EL(95)97—on the introduction of beta interferon into the national health service was issued in November 1995, together with clinical guidance approved by the standing medical advisory committee. Copies are available in the Library.

Hearing Checks

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department provides to health authorities on the screening programmes for detecting hearing impairments among babies; and what information his Department collates by *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* hospitals in respect of such programmes. [11125]

Mr. Boateng: The Department of Health does not currently give guidance to health authorities on neonatal screening for hearing impairment, nor does it collect information centrally. We are aware that there is scope for considerable improvement in neonatal screening procedures for hearing impairment and will be examining the latest research evidence on this subject.

NHS Finances

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the present cumulative deficit of all hospital trusts, health authorities and other NHS bodies for 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [11394]

Mr. Milburn: Information on the 1997–98 income and expenditure positions of trusts and health authorities will be provided in due course.

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Dome

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio (1) if *(a)* lead, *(b)* cadmium and *(c)* organo-tins will be used as heat stabilisers for the construction of the millennium dome; [10688]

(2) what stabilisers will be used in the PVC used on the millennium dome; [10690]

(3) if phthalate softeners will be used in the construction of the millennium dome. [10687]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* PVC-coated polyester is the safest and most environmentally sound fabric available for the dome covering. The covering will use phthalate plasticisers and the heat stabilisers will primarily be zinc and barium salts. The New Millennium Experience Company is still negotiating with PVC suppliers but has confirmed that an order will be placed only when it is satisfied that all European and UK environmental and safety standards will be met or exceeded.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

State Education Expenditure

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average level at current prices of state education expenditure per pupil in each of the regions of Great Britain in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1997. [11197]

Mr. Byers: The average net institutional expenditure per pupil in 1997–98 prices in LEA-maintained schools, excluding special schools, in England was £1,388 in 1979–80 and £1,909 in 1995–96, the latest year for which data are available.

Information on expenditure per pupil in Scotland and Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales respectively.

Higher Education Funding

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Eeducation and Employment if it is his policy that all of the additional money raised by the proposed changes in higher education *(a)* tuition fees and *(b)* maintenance arrangements will be made available for the financing of higher education, in addition to planned budgets; and if he will make a statement. [11187]

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the additional resources raised by the proposed changes to the higher education funding system will be specifically directed to this sector. [11051]

Dr. Howells: It will take time for the Government's proposals to begin to generate additional money because the increase in the cost of loans will initially offset the yield from the introduction of fees but, as my right hon. Friend said in his statement to the House on 23 July, *Official Report*, columns 949–62, the Government will ensure that savings are used to improve quality, standards and opportunity for all in further and higher education.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–00; and if he will make a statement. [11385]

Dr. Howells: Not all computer-related expenditure is separately identified. Identified expenditure and plans for expenditure include:

£ million

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*
DfEE departmental expenditure					
Current	22.9	24.9	21.1	21.0	21.0
Capital	7.4	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5
Employment Service expenditure					
Current	134.9	88.3	69.4	70.2	71.0
Capital	52.9	29.5	11.3	8.6	8.3

The current expenditure of both DfEE and the Employment Service include staff costs. The significant change in expenditure in the Employment Service from 1995–96 to 1996–97 reflects the introduction of JSA and the resultant changes in expenditure patterns.

Computer-related expenditure in schools is not reported separately. Since 1995–96 support for expenditure on information technology has been available through the school effectiveness component of the GEST programme. However, it is mainly for schools to determine how much to spend on information technology in the light of their own needs and priorities. In further education none of the funding provided by the Department is hypothecated to IT, but the Further Education Funding Council has announced two initiatives this year: through the QUILT programme of staff development the FEFC will contribute £1.9 million over the five-year period from February 1997. For networking and other technical developments broadly recommended by the Higginson committee, the FEFC will contribute £575,000 over three years from October 1997. The Higher Education Funding Council for England gives higher education institutions a block grant for both recurrent and capital purposes; it is for it to decide how much to spend on computer-related current and capital work. However, the HEFCE has also provided specific grants on computer-related current and capital work of over £100 million in the three years ending 1997–98. There is also computer-related expenditure in training and enterprise council programmes and careers libraries, but this is not separately identified.

The Department is currently undergoing a comprehensive review of all its spending, and plans for future years may therefore change as a result of its findings.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will require the assessment for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder of children suspended from school more than three times; and if he will make a statement. [10551]

Ms Estelle Morris: Decisions on whether to assess children for statements of special educational need are for schools and local education authorities. In the autumn we shall consult on guidance to LEAs on their duty under the Education Act 1997 to draw up, consult upon and publish a plan setting out the arrangements they make for pupils with behavioural difficulties. We will also consult on revised guidance to LEAs and schools on exclusions. This will confirm that, when deciding whether to exclude, head teachers should consider whether a child's disciplinary problems might be a sign of an emerging emotional and behavioural difficulty giving rise to special educational need. There are no plans to advise head teachers to look for particular disorders.

Teachers' Pension Scheme

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of responses to the further consultation exercise on proposals for changes to the early retirement provisions of the teachers' pension scheme; and if he will make a statement. [11695]

Mr. Byers: After considering the responses to the consultation exercise, my right hon. Friend has decided to introduce with effect from 1 September 1997 two improvements to the existing provisions of the teachers' scheme. The first will improve the arrangements for teachers who step down to posts of lower responsibility to preserve the level of their retirement benefits. A particularly useful feature of the new provisions is that they will apply where an individual changes employer.

The second improvement is to the calculation of pension benefits for regular part-time teachers. These arrangements will mean that the average salary on which the pension is based is the same as it would have been if the teacher had been employed in a full-time capacity.

In the autumn, we shall invite representatives of teachers and their employers to join us in an examination of the teachers' pension scheme for the longer term, looking at a range of issues suggested by teachers' unions, teachers' employers and others.

We have decided not to introduce at this time the option of actuarially reduced pensions for teachers as a new form of retirement. This proposal will be looked at again in the longer-term examination.

Copyright

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures his Department is taking to ensure compliance with copyright law; and if he proposes to take out a photocopying licence with the Copyright Licensing Agency. [10991]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The Department has a number of procedures within its library service and reprographic centres to ensure compliance with copyright law and librarians and photocopying staff receive formal instruction on the need to operate within the copyright law. The Department has no plans at present to take out a photocopying licence with the Copyright Licensing Agency.

TREASURY

Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what informal meetings the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe attended on Budget matters in the Treasury before the Budget statement. [10456]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* No informal meeting took place to make Budget decisions that involved the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe.

Windfall Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will change the calculation of the windfall tax liabilities by entity in order to put these on a constant price basis; and if he will make a statement. [11370]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: No. The Chancellor gave very careful consideration to the tax base in framing his proposals for the windfall tax.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10736]

Mrs. Liddell: The payroll service for the Treasury is provided by Chessington Computer Services Ltd. using the standard payroll input and retrieval system—SPIRE. The costs to the Treasury of the Chessington service for 1997–98 is £57,000 inclusive of VAT. Monthly salary changes are processed and input to SPIRE within the Treasury by two payroll clerks and one payroll administration manager at an annual salary cost for the three staff of £48,079. Under the terms of the contract, Chessington Computer Services Ltd. is responsible for making payments to staff using the bankers automated clearing service—BACS—and for making deductions such as tax and national insurance contributions.

The Treasury does not have any co-operative arrangements with other Departments for the provision or administration of payroll services.

Bank of England

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's proposals to implement the transfer to the Treasury of the Bank of England's responsibilities for debt management, the sale of gilts, oversight of the gilts market and cash management. [11625]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government today published a proposal for consultation on the arrangements for Government debt and cash management. We propose to establish an agency of the Treasury to implement the annual borrowing programme, to liaise and deal with participants in the gilts market and to manage the Exchequer's cash position. Copies of the document have been placed in the Library of the House.

Unpaid Work

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what statistics the Office for National Statistics compiles on the value of unpaid work to the economy. [10660]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mrs. Jackie Ballard, dated 29 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to your recent question on statistics ONS compile on the value of unpaid work to the economy.

ONS publishes no direct estimates of unpaid labour. It plans, however, to publish an experimental account of household production in the ONS publication *Economic Trends* in the next few months, based on time use surveys. An article describing the approach was published in *Economic Trends* in July 1996.

The above publication is available in the House of Commons Library.

Strikes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many working days were lost as a result of strikes in each year between 1974 and 1997. [11348]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. John Bercow, dated 29 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many working days have been lost as a result of strikes in each year between 1974 and 1997.

Annual data are only available up to 1996. Data for 1974 to 1996 are shown in the attached table.

Number of working days lost in the United Kingdom due to labour disputes

	Working days lost (thousands)
1974	14,750
1975	6,012
1976	3,284
1977	10,142
1978	9,405
1979	29,474
1980	11,964
1981	4,266
1982	5,313
1983	3,754
1984	27,135
1985	6,402
1986	1,920
1987	3,546
1988	3,702
1989	4,128
1990	1,903
1991	761
1992	528
1993	649
1994	278
1995	415
1996	1,303

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many working days have been lost as a result of strikes in each year since 1974. [10887]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Philip Hammond, dated 29 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many working days have been lost as a result of strikes in each year since 1974.

The data requested are in the attached table.

Number of working days lost in the United Kingdom due to labour disputes

	Working days lost (thousands)
1974	14,750
1975	6,012
1976	3,284
1977	10,142
1978	9,405
1979	29,474
1980	11,964
1981	4,266
1982	5,313
1983	3,754
1984	27,135
1985	6,402
1986	1,920
1987	3,546
1988	3,702
1989	4,128
1990	1,903
1991	761
1992	528
1993	649
1994	278
1995	415
1996	1,303

Health Authority Populations

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* male and *(b)* female population of each health authority by gender. [10663]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mrs. Jackie Ballard, dated 29 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as the Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent question asking for the population of each health authority by gender. The data you requested are attached.

It is the ONS' policy to publish population estimates rounded to at least the nearest 100 persons. When estimates are provided as they are here, in units, this is in order to facilitate further calculations e.g. mortality rates. Unit estimates cannot be accurate to that level of detail.

Estimated population mid-1995
Health areas that come into effect on 1 April 1996

Regional office health authority	*Total persons*	*Total male*	*Total female*
Bradford	482,694	237,678	245,016
Calderdale and Kirklees	580,963	284,484	296,479
County Durham	607,670	297,874	309,796
East Riding	576,993	283,581	293,412
Gateshead and South Tyneside	358,118	174,512	183,606
Leeds	724,967	357,634	367,333
Newcastle and North Tyneside	477,068	231,970	245,098
North Cumbria	318,081	156,638	161,443
Northumberland	307,296	149,979	157,317
North Yorkshire	730,636	355,352	375,284
Sunderland	295,829	144,201	151,628
Tees	559,160	273,839	285,321
Wakefield	317,148	156,868	160,280
Northern and Yorkshire	6,336,623	3,104,610	3,232,013
Barnsley	226,711	111,395	115,316
Doncaster	292,877	144,511	148,366
Leicestershire	923,001	458,290	464,711
Lincolnshire	611,846	299,089	312,757
North Derbyshire	371,084	183,103	187,981
North Nottinghamshire	391,738	193,815	197,923
Nottingham	640,201	315,722	324,479
Rotherham	255,751	126,469	129,282
Sheffield	528,518	262,356	266,162
Southern Derbyshire	555,060	275,647	279,413
South Humber	312,198	153,495	158,703
Trent	5,108,985	2,523,892	2,585,093
Bedfordshire	545,660	272,079	273,581
Berkshire	783,231	392,439	390,792
Buckinghamshire	665,878	330,396	335,482
Cambridge and Huntingdon	442,390	219,457	222,933
East Norfolk	614,669	301,149	313,520
Northamptonshire	599,284	296,459	302,825
North West Anglia	409,177	202,314	206,863
Oxfordshire	598,354	298,904	299,450
Suffolk	565,809	323,142	333,667
Anglia and Oxford	5,315,452	2,636,339	2,679,113
Barking and Havering	385,789	188,654	197,135
Barnet	312,431	151,757	160,674
Brent and Harrow	455,401	224,815	230,586
Camden and Islington	359,402	174,496	184,906
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	652,162	321,046	331,116
East and North Hertfordshire	491,050	243,330	247,720
East London and The City	600,575	299,359	301,216
Enfield and Haringey	474,679	233,717	240,962
Hillingdon	245,295	121,379	123,916
Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster	349,165	170,768	178,397
North Essex	878,770	430,861	447,909
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	448,411	219,644	228,767
South Essex	698,739	341,951	356,788
West Hertfordshire	520,167	256,229	263,938
North Thames	6,872,036	3,378,006	3,494,030
Bexley and Greenwich	431,653	210,300	221,353
Bromley	293,385	142,045	151,340
Croydon	330,933	162,133	168,800
East Kent	587,118	283,360	303,758
East Surrey	411,163	200,057	211,106
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	730,864	346,600	384,264
Kingston and Richmond	315,756	153,722	162,034
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	733,397	357,216	376,181
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	618,657	300,743	317,914
West Kent	964,143	474,528	489,615
West Surrey	633,195	311,454	321,741
West Sussex	731,482	350,533	380,949
South Thames	6,781,746	3,292,691	3,489,055
Avon	982,343	484,177	498,166
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	482,688	234,051	248,637
Dorset	678,668	326,998	351,670
Gloucestershire	552,731	272,525	280,206
Isle of Wight	125,111	60,163	64,948
North and East Devon	468,749	225,973	242,776
North and Mid Hampshire	543,260	269,400	273,860
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	539,007	265,029	273,978
Somerset	481,041	234,626	246,415
Southampton and South West Hampshire	534,407	264,376	270,031
South and West Devon	590,030	286,160	303,870
Wiltshire	590,610	292,677	297,933
South and West	6,568,645	3,216,155	3,352,490
Birmingham	1,017,458	502,404	515,054
Coventry	303,555	149,969	153,586
Dudley	312,453	154,916	157,537
Herefordshire	164,519	80,551	83,968
North Staffordshire	472,199	233,834	238,365
Sandwell	293,701	144,148	149,553
Shropshire	419,880	207,676	212,204
Solihull	202,882	99,220	103,662
South Staffordshire	584,249	290,662	293,587
Walsall	262,770	130,045	132,725
Warwickshire	498,662	246,411	252,251
Wolverhampton	244,335	120,342	123,993
Worcestershire	529,759	260,644	269,115
West Midlands	5,306,422	2,620,822	2,685,600
Bury and Rochdale	389,489	191,519	197,970
East Lancashire	512,864	252,206	260,658

Estimated population mid-1995
Health areas that come into effect on 1 April 1996

Regional office health authority	*Total persons*	*Total male*	*Total female*
Liverpool	470,826	229,214	241,612
Manchester	432,641	213,111	219,530
Morecambe Bay	308,403	149,808	158,595
North Cheshire	311,196	153,654	157,542
North West Lancashire	466,713	226,720	239,993
St. Helens and Knowsley	333,880	163,160	170,720
Salford and Trafford	448,798	221,029	227,769
Sefton	290,971	138,791	152,180
South Cheshire	666,893	327,403	339,490
South Lancashire	310,255	152,098	158,157
Stockport	290,569	141,810	148,759
West Pennine	473,287	232,244	241,043
Wigan and Bolton	575,228	283,776	291,452
Wirral	331,518	158,557	172,961
North West	6,613,531	3,235,100	3,378,431
Bro Taf	726,893	356,784	370,109
Dyfed Powys	475,558	233,078	242,480
Gwent	556,322	272,751	283,571
Morgannwg	500,911	244,521	256,390
North Wales	657,098	318,360	338,738
Wales	2,916,782	1,425,494	1,491,288

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the *(a)* percentage increase and *(b)* average annual increase in the retail prices index between (i) March 1974 and April 1979 and (ii) May 1979 and April 1997. [10892]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Christopher Fraser, dated 29 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question about the increase in the Retail Prices Index.

Between March 1974 and April 1979 the percentage increase in the Retail Prices Index was 108.8 per cent for the period. This compares with 185.6 per cent for the period May 1979 to April 1997.

The average annual increase in the Retail Prices Index for the period March 1974 to April 1979 was 15.3 per cent per annum. This compares with 6.0 per cent for the period May 1979 to April 1997.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of *(a)* casualties and *(b)* fatalities caused by the interaction between prescribed and illegal drugs in each of the last three years. [11016]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 29 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to your recent parliamentary question on drug casualties and fatalities. However, this information is not held centrally.

The ONS collects and compiles information on the cause of all deaths registered in England and Wales. In the case of deaths due to any form of poisoning by drugs or drug abuse, the death will be certified by a coroner following an inquest. The coroner's certificate of cause of death, used to register these deaths, includes a short section on the cause (in the format of the medical certificate of cause of death recommended by the WHO), the verdict and certain details about the circumstances of accidental deaths. The level of information therefore normally received by the ONS would include the names of all the drugs known to have been taken or found in toxicological analyses. When more than one drug is mentioned on the certificate, it is not usually stated which was responsible for the death, nor whether any interaction between them was suspected or proven.

Whether a drug was prescribed for the deceased or another person, bought over the counter or obtained illicitly is not normally recorded on the death certificate. The coroner's verdict may state that the death was due to dependence on or abuse of a drug or drugs. However, many certificates of deaths due to poisoning with controlled drugs do not mention abuse or dependence, and may have accidental, suicidal or open verdicts. Many controlled drugs can be legitimately prescribed for therapeutic purposes. A very small number of deaths are certified as due to adverse reactions to therapeutic drugs in normal use, with either an accidental or therapeutic misadventure verdict. In addition to controlled and prescription only drugs, those taken therapeutically may include over the counter preparations.

A greater level of detail may be recorded in the coroner's inquest reports, but these are not routinely collected, coded or analysed nationally.

The ONS does not collect figures on admissions to hospital, patients seen in accident and emergency departments or cases notified to poisons advice centres.

Life Span

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the expected life span of a child born in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1997. [10906]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Nick Gibb, dated 29 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to your recent parliamentary question on the expectation of life at birth in the United Kingdom.

The data you requested, according to the mortality rates experienced in the year in question, are as follows:

	Males	*Females*
1979	70.0	76.2
1995[1]	74.0	79.3

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[1] Latest year for which data are available. Figures supplied by the Government Actuary's Department.

Unemployment

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the change in unemployment levels in each former parliamentary constituency in Great Britain between *(a)* December 1992 and *(b)* December 1997. [11244]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Peter Luff, dated 29 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the change in unemployment levels in each former parliamentary constituency in Great Britain.

The measure of unemployment, derived from the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS), is defined on a consistent and internationally recognised basis set out by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and counts as unemployed people who are: a) without a job; b) available to start work within the next two weeks and c) have either looked for work in the last four weeks or are waiting to start a job already obtained. However, largely because it is a sample survey, information is not available from the LFS in as much geographical detail as from the claimant count measure described below.

ONS also publishes the monthly claimant count, which is based on the administrative system and includes all people claiming unemployed-related benefits (i.e. Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support or National Insurance credits) at Employment Service offices on the day of the monthly count, who on that day had signed on as unemployed and available to do any suitable work. Essentially, all people who attend an Employment Service office to sign are counted, irrespective of whether they are actually receiving benefit.

The information you have requested is only available from the claimant count, as the Labour Force Survey does not give details down to constituency levels as explained.

Information on the levels of claimant count by former Parliamentary Constituency are based on the 1981 Census which are only available up to March 1996. Parliamentary Constituency data from April 1996 were based on the new 1991 Census. All this information can be obtained from the NOMIS database at the House of Commons Library.

Temporary Contracts

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the proportion of people currently employed on temporary contracts in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France, *(c)* Spain and *(d)* Italy; and to what extent this has changed since (i) 1987 and (ii) 1992. [10891]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Christopher Fraser, dated 29 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the proportion of people currently employed on temporary contracts in the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Italy.

Numbers of temporary employees and all employees are published in the Eurostat publication *Labour Force Survey Results* which is available in the House of Commons Library. The most recent edition is for 1995. The proportions for spring of each of the years 1987, 1992 and 1995 are shown in the table below. The latest figure for the United Kingdom, for winter 1996/7, is also shown.

Heading employees as a proportion of all employees (per cent.)

	United Kingdom	*France*	*Spain*	*Italy*
Spring 1987	6.2	7.1	15.6	5.4
Spring 1992	5.4	10.4	33.5	7.6
Spring 1995	6.8	12.2	35.0	7.2
Winter 1996–97	7.4	—	—	—

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the changes in levels of *(a)* manufacturing productivity and *(b)* overall productivity between (i) March 1974 and April 1979 and (ii) May 1979 and April 1997. [10888]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Philip Hammond, dated 29 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question regarding changes in levels of manufacturing and whole economy productivity.

Information is not available for the dates requested but is given for the nearest period in the table below.

Sector	*Period*	*Percentage change*
Manufacturing	Q1 1974 to Q1 1979	5.7
	Q2 1979 to Q1 1997	83.5
Whole economy	Q1 1974 to Q1 1979	9.4
	Q2 1979 to Q1 1997	36.7

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was manufacturing output in the United Kingdom in each year between 1979 and 1997 in terms of *(a)* volume and *(b)* value at current prices. [10959]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Dominic Grieve, dated 29 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on manufacturing output in the United Kingdom in each year between 1979 and 1997.

The index of the volume of manufacturing output at constant prices for each year between 1986 and 1996 can be accessed as Series DVZK on the ONS databank by the House of Commons Library. Data for 1997 is not yet available. The indices for the years 1979 to 1985 are given in the table below:

Year	*Volume of manufacturing output at constant prices*
1979	90.6
1980	82.8
1981	77.7
1982	77.6
1983	79.2
1984	82.2

Data on the value of manufacturing output at current prices is available for the complete range of years between 1979 and 1996 and can be accessed as series CFLV on the ONS databank by the House of Commons Library. Data for 1997 is not yet available.

Exports

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total value at current prices of United Kingdom exports of *(a)* goods, *(b)* services and *(c)* all items in each year since 1979. [10961]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Dominic Grieve, dated 29 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the total value at current prices of United Kingdom exports.

Estimates for imports and exports of goods and services, investment income, transfers and the total balance of payments current account back to 1975 will be published in Table 1.4 of the 1997 edition of *United Kingdom Balance of Payments: The Pink Book* to be published by The Stationery Office on 8 August, a copy of which will be available in the House of Commons Library. The data to be published in the Pink Book is already available through the ONS databank which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Next Steps Agencies

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will ensure that the definition of the relationship between operational and policy decisions is made according to the function and framework brief of each next steps agency. [10522]

Dr. David Clark: It is the responsibility of the departmental Minister, having set the framework within which the Department's executive agencies operate, to ensure that this is reflected, as necessary, in the conduct of business. The framework documents for next steps agencies seek to set out as precisely as possible those matters assigned by Ministers to chief executives and for which the chief executives are responsible to Ministers, recognising that it is impracticable to predict every eventuality that may arise in the life span of individual framework documents.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to review the regional operation of next steps agencies following the publication of proposals on the regional development agencies; and if he will make a statement. [10520]

Dr. Clark: This is a matter for the departmental Ministers responsible for individual executive agencies.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will introduce guidelines requiring next steps agencies to produce key performance indicators which are comparable between agencies; and if he will make a statement. [10521]

Dr. Clark: I have asked colleagues to pay particular attention to selecting the most appropriate key performance indicators for their agencies and to setting stretching targets for them. However, most agencies produce outputs which are not directly comparable with those of other agencies. Even where similar outputs are produced, for example in those concerned with prisons, social security and public records, direct comparisons may be misleading because the agencies concerned have different customers, operate in differing social or economic environments, or work within different legislative frameworks. The Minister concerned is best placed to decide the key performance indicators taking into account individual circumstances.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management system purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10738]

Dr. David Clark: For this purpose, I have responsibility for the Cabinet Office, including the Prime Minister's Office and the Office of Public Service and its agencies and the Central Office of Information.

Pay for non-industrial staff 1996–97

The collation and processing of pay data, including rates of basic pay, overtime and allowances—by internal pay sections.

Method of transfer of pay data from internal pay section to subcontractor—computer link known as SPIRE.

Tax, national insurance and other deductions are net payments to staff made by subcontractor—Chessington Computer Services Ltd.

Departmental internal costs—£201,000.

Cost of service level agreement with subcontractor—£217,000.

Pay for industrial staff 1996–97

The collation of pay data, including rates of basic pay, overtime and allowances—by internal pay sections.

Method of transfer of pay data from internal pay section to subcontractor—computer disk or paper-based systems where numbers are small.

Processing of pay data. Tax, national insurance and other deductions and net payments made to staff by subcontractor—Ministry of Defence, Pay and Personnel Agency.

Departmental internal costs—£115,000.

Cost of contact with subcontractor—£74,000.

Civil Service

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the monthly changes in total civil service numbers for each month since 1 January. [11155]

Mr. David Clark: Civil service staffing figures are compiled quarterly. Information for the latest available four quarters is as follows:

	Permanent staff	*Casual staff*	*All staff*
1 July 1996	492,100	21,800	513,900
1 October 1996	486,800	22,300	509,100

	Permanent staff	Casual staff	All staff
1 January 1997	482,800	23,400	506,200
1 April 1997	475,700	19,600	495,300

Figures for 1 July 1997 will be published at the end of August.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–00; and if he will make a statement. [11387]

Dr. David Clark: Estimates of the total departmental expenditure on computer-related work by the Cabinet Office, the Office of Public Service and its agencies and the Central Office of Information are:

£ million

	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98
Current	3.25	4.78	5.56
Capital	4.15	4.89	3.55
Total	7.40	9.67	9.11

Expenditure plans for 1998–99 and 1999–00 have not yet been finalised.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ashford Great Park Development Project

Mr. Stuart Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received the reports from the audit committee of the Church Commissioners about the commissioners' involvement in the Ashford Great Park development project. [11515]

Mr. Straw: I have received these reports and have placed copies of them in the Library.

Juveniles

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the incidence of physical and sexual abuse by inmates in respect of juveniles in detention in the last year. [9279]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 July 1997]:* In the last financial year, there were 292 cases of assault where the victim was a juvenile. Only four of these assaults were of an alleged sexual nature.

Immigration

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued on the target waiting time for calls to the telephone inquiry bureau of the immigration directorate; and what steps he has taken to reduce waiting times. [10483]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Waiting time and staff productivity targets are reviewed regularly. Productivity targets are either met or exceeded but the need to divert staff to deal with personal callers in the public inquiry office has resulted in some failure to meet waiting time targets. Priority at busy times will continue to be given to personal callers but extra staff are being recruited to cover the telephones. Immigration applicants are being encouraged to make telephone inquiries to the case worker handling their case.

Mohammed Riaz and Quayyun Raja

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the tariffs to be served by Mohammed Riaz and Quayyun Raja were last reviewed; and what was the outcome of the review. [10875]

Ms Quin: The tariffs for these two mandatory life sentence prisoners were last reviewed by Ministers in 1995–96. The outcome of that review was that the tariffs were set afresh at the same level as they had been before they were quashed by the divisional court in December 1994—20 years for Mohammed Riaz and 25 years for Quayyun Raja. Following recent representations, we have agreed to look again at the circumstances of these cases.

Sunlight

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the variations in the duration of sunlight in the United Kingdom since 1977. [10951]

Mr. George Howarth: Following a preliminary survey in 1987, the Home Office commissioned a survey of interest groups in 1988 into options for summer time arrangements. The views of respondents and the arguments that were advanced were reviewed in the 1989 Green Paper "Summer Time: A Consultation Document", Cm 722.

Responses to the Green Paper showed that there was a lack of consensus about the merits of the United Kingdom moving to central European time, also known as single/double summer time. A private Member's Bill, The British Time (Extra Daylight) Bill, which would have achieved such a move did not attract enough support for a Second Reading when it was debated on 19 January 1996. The debate illustrated the strength of feeling and diversity of opinion on the issue.

Special Secure Units

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the recommendations made by Sir Donald Acheson in his report on special secure units indicating which have been implemented; and if he will make a statement. [11098]

Ms Quin: Sir Donald Acheson's report contained nine recommendations. Action has been taken on these as follows:

> "1. Given the short duration of the present regime, it is premature to come to a firm conclusion on its impact on prisoners' health. We therefore advise that the general health of prisoners detained in special secure units (SSUs) be reviewed at regular intervals, taking into account their degree of susceptibility to psychological symptoms.
>
> *Response*
>
> The SSU Operating Standards have been amended to require that medical officers should undertake formal reviews of the health of prisoners detained in SSUs every three months.

2. A standard set of procedures applicable to all SSUs should be devised, circulated to all parties and enforced to ensure the most expeditious transfer of prisoners requiring emergency treatment to National Health Service hospitals.

Response

The Operating Standards have been amended to emphasise the importance of prompt action.

3. SSUs should be provided with the same level of first aid and emergency aid equipment as other wings in the prison. Personnel trained in using this equipment should be on duty in the SSU at all times.

Response

Healthcare in SSUs is comparable to that elsewhere in the Prison Service. Arrangements exist to ensure that first aid be administered immediately to prisoners in SSUs.

4. Prisoners should be held in SSUs for as short a period as possible.

Response

This is existing policy.

5. Prisoners should be informed when their cases are coming before the SSU committee and be given the opportunity to submit written representations. When feasible, an indication as to how long prisoners will be required to stay in the SSU system should be given.

Response

This is existing policy.

6. Sentence planning should be introduced as with other long term prisoners.

Response

The overriding consideration is determining the length of time a prisoner spends in a special unit must be security. However, the Operating Standards have been amended to provide that regular reviews are undertaken of prisoners' behaviour, attitude and other relevant issues. Review arrangements ensure that the necessary information is collected on the prisoner to inform my future sentencing planning.

7. More opportunities for mental stimulation and physical exercise should be provided, including the provision of meaningful activity.

Response

This is existing policy. Opportunities for constructive activity have increased.

8. It is the unanimous view of the group that, in the interests of health, prisoners in the SSUs should have access to open visits with members of their immediate family. We believe that it should be possible for the Prison Service to devise visits which prevent the passage of unauthorised items whilst at the same time retaining the advantages to the prisoners of physical contact possible only in open visits. Given the logistics involved in conducting secure open visits, it is for the Prison Service to determine their frequency and management.

Response

This recommendation has not been accepted although the policy is under review.

9. Staff should be encouraged to form relationships with prisoners, yet remain sufficiently detached to maintain objectivity and resist being compromised.

Response

This is existing policy."

Metropolitan Police

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what disciplinary action was taken against Metropolitan police officers involved in a disturbance outside minicab offices on the Holloway road in north London on 17 March 1996. [9963]

Mr. Michael: The commissioner informs me that two Metropolitan police officers are to face a disciplinary board on charges of abuse of authority and two other officers were admonished as a result of the investigation.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were employed by the Metropolitan police in each year since 1979. [11156]

Mr. Michael: I am advised by the Metropolitan police service that the number of officers employed by it from 1979 is as follows:

1979: 22,786

1980: 23,691

1981: 25,161

1982: 26,350

1983: 26,806

1984: 26,844

1985: 26,783

1986: 27,005

1987: 27,438

1988: 28,009

1989: 28,267

1990: 28,364

1991: 28,455

1992: 28,229.7

1993: 28,045.3

1994: 28,070.6

1995: 27,719.4

1996: 27,420.4

These figures are as at 31 December—end of year figures—and do not include any officers on secondment to or from the Metropolitan police service. Figures for 1992 onwards show a full-time equivalent figure and take account of part-time work; there were no part-time workers prior to 1992.

HMP Belmarsh

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards providing prisoners detained in the special secure unit at Her Majesty's prison Belmarsh with four hours of education a day on request. [9964]

Ms Quin: Prisoners in the special secure unit at Belmarsh prison can, if they wish, attend formal education classes for up to three hours a day. This exceeds the number of hours of education available in the main prison and, given the extremely low take-up of education by SSU prisoners, there are no plans at present to increase further the number of hours available.

In addition to formal education classes, prisoners can study in their cells if they so wish. In the past, a number of SSU prisoners have participated in Open university courses in this way.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on provision of adequate ventilation for cells and recreation areas within the special secure unit at HMP Belmarsh. [9965]

Ms Quin: Adequate ventilation is available in cells in the special secure unit at Belmarsh. It has, however, been accepted by Belmarsh that the ventilation of the association areas needs to be improved during periods of hot weather.

To facilitate this, Belmarsh has recently changed procedures to allow prisoners to keep open cell doors and windows at times when they are out of their cells. It has also installed large fans. These measures have greatly increased the ventilation of the association areas, improving matters significantly.

Diarmuid O'Neill Investigation

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Police Complaints Authority has completed its investigation into the shooting of Diarmuid O'Neill on 23 September 1996; and if he will make a statement. [9962]

Mr. Straw: The Police Complaints Authority's investigation is continuing. I understand that some of the evidence in the case may also be relevant to the forthcoming trial of the men arrested with Mr. O'Neill and that the Police Complaints Authority's investigation will not be completed until their trial is over, lest its inquiries prejudice the trial.

Disabled People (Access to Polling Stations)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for making an assessment of the recommendations in the SCOPE report, "Polls Apart 2", with specific reference to *(a)* increasing the grant to local authorities for providing temporary ramps for polling stations and *(b)* increasing the grant for low-level accessible polling booths. [10471]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government are considering SCOPE's report, which we welcome. At present, 50 per cent. grants are available towards the cost of purchasing temporary ramps and 80 per cent. grants are available for polling screens adapted for use by electors in wheelchairs. Funds for such grants are not capped and since 1992 a total of £213,000 has been spent towards the provision of temporary ramps. Separate figures are not kept on the purchase of specially adapted polling screens.

We are looking very carefully at the arrangements for future funding for this equipment.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter dated 11 June, ref. No. 9675/97, regarding a constituent. [11081]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am writing today to my hon. Friend.

Prison Places

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison places were available in each year since 1979. [11250]

Ms Quin: The information required is given in the table.

Certified normal accommodation—CNA—30 June

	CNA
1979	37,881
1980	38,472
1981	38,747
1982	38,653
1983	38,783
1984	39,033
1985	39,804
1986	40,811
1987	41,994
1988	44,179
1989	45,427
1990	42,804
1991	43,875
1992	46,239
1993	46,646
1994	48,291
1995	50,239
1996	53,152
1997	56,329

Source:

Prison statistics England and Wales 1989 and 1995.

Figures for 1996 and 1997 strategic planning section, HM Prison Service.

Note:

Accommodation excludes places taken out of use for refurbishment. It represents the total number of uncrowded places estimated to be available in the prison estate.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the percentage change in recorded crime in the last four years. [11127]

Mr. Michael: Between 1992 and 1996, total recorded crime fell by 10 per cent.

However, over the same period, total recorded violent crime rose by 21 per cent. and total recorded crime today is 31 per cent. higher than it was 10 years ago. We have begun a determined onslaught on crime and the causes of crime. Our strategy places the victim at the heart of the criminal justice system and aims to tackle what has become an unacceptable level of crime and neighbourhood disorder.

Firearms Compensation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on firearms compensation and related costs in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–00 and how these figures differ from those assumed in the departmental spending plans contained in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98"; and if he will make a statement. [11248]

Mr. Michael: The expected costs of the compensation for firearms and ancillary equipment was set out at the time of the parliamentary debates on the compensation scheme and the current Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

The present estimate of expenditure on compensation and related costs arising from the implementation of the

Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 and the Firearms (Amendment) Bill is as follows:

	£ million	
	1997–98	*1998–99*
Compensation payments	115	45
Administrative costs	5	1
Total	120	46

No expenditure is expected in 1999–00.

No specific provision was made for firearms compensation in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98" although the cost of compensation was identified as a potential claim on the reserve.

New Technology

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been invested at current prices by the Government in each year since 1979 in new technology to help the police deal with crime. [11355]

Mr. Michael: The information is not available in the form requested. In the years 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 respectively, the Home Office budget for central scientific and technical support for the police is £48.9 million, £51.9 million and £59.4 million at 1997–98 prices. It should be noted that these are aggregate figures and will cover such items as the general operating costs of the police national computer.

One of its next steps agencies, the Forensic Science Service, has invested or will invest the following over the same period: £3 million, £3.1 million and £3.4 million on capital investment in new technology, and £3.5 million, £2.9 million and £3 million on research and development activity, excluding equipment, all at 1997–98 prices.

Police (Staff)

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the number of *(a)* police officers and *(b)* police civilian staff workers in each year since 1979. [11157]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is set out in the table:

As at March	*Police*	*Civilians*
1979	111,133	34,598
1980	114,543	35,420
1981	118,102	37,143
1982	119,973	37,170
1983	121,003	37,373
1984	121,053	37,818
1985	120,116	38,497
1986	120,848	39,351
1987	122,236	40,592
1988	124,080	41,786
1989	125,631	42,767
1990	126,777	44,525
1991	127,495	46,361
1992	127,627	47,336
1993	128,290	49,518
1994	127,897	50,229
1995	127,222	51,096
1996	126,878	52,933
1997 (Provisional)	127,158	53,011

Prison Officers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers were in post in each year since 1979. [11251]

Ms Quin: The information required is given in the table.

Prison officers in post each year since 1979

	Number
1979	11,138
1980	11,225
1981	12,192
1982	12,198
1983	12,312
1984	12,713
1985	13,022
1986	13,336
1987	[1]19,072
1988	18,039
1989	19,629
1990	20,785
1991	21,421
1992	23,029
1993	23,994
1994	23,756
1995	24,237
1996	24,398
1997	[2]23,058

[1] The increase between 1986 and 1987 reflects the change in prison officer working practices and the reduction in their hours worked.

[2] The reduction from 1996 to 1997 can be partly explained by the fact that prison officers left under the voluntary early severance scheme.

Prisons

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* new prisons have opened and *(b)* prisons have closed in each year since 1979. [11249]

Ms Quin: Table A details new prison establishments that have been brought into use—short-term conversions of, for example, Army camps are not included—since 1979. Table B details those which have been taken out of use since 1979.

Table A: New prisons opened by year since 1979

Year	*Name of prison*	*Current role*
1979	Wymott	C
1980	—	—
1981	—	—
1982	Frankland	Dispersal
1983	Castington	YOI
1984	—	—
1985	Featherstone	C
	Lindholme	C
	Wayland	C
	Stocken	C
	Thorn Cross	Open YOI

Table A: New prisons opened by year since 1979

Year	*Name of prison*	*Current role*
1986	—	—
1987	Full Sutton	Dispersal
1988	Littlehey	C
	The Mount	C
	Swaleside	B
	Garth	B
1989	Downview	C
1990	—	—
1991	Belmarsh	Local/Dispersal
	Moorland	YOI/Audit Male Trainer/Audit Remand
	Whitemoor	Dispersal
	Brinsford	YOI
1992	Elmley	Local/Trainer
	Bullingdon	Local
	Wolds	Remand Centre
	Holme House	Local
	Woodhill	Local
	High Down	Local
1993	Lancaster Farms	YOI
	Blakenhurst	Local
	Doncaster	Local
1995	Buckley Hall	C

YOI: young offenders institution.

Table B: Prisons taken out of use since 1979

Year taken out of use	*Name of prison*
1981	Appleton Thorn
1982	Moor Court
1983	Gaynes Hall
1987	Medomsley
1988	Gringley
1989	Ashford
1989	Buckley Hall
1991	Campsfield House
1992	Lowdham Grange
1992	Northeye
1996	Finnamore Wood
1996	Oxford
1996	Pucklechurch

Three of locations—Appleton Thorn, Buckley Hall and Gaynes Hall—are now the sites of new prisons; HMYOI Thorn Cross, HMP Buckley Hall and HMP Littlehey respectively. In addition, Lowdham Grange is currently being rebuilt and another, Pucklechurch, is to be rebuilt during 1998–99. Planning clearance also exists to build a new prison on the site of what was Ashford remand centre.

Prison Service

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the level of public spending in current prices on the Prison Service was in each year since 1979. [11356]

Ms Quin: Expenditure by the Prison Service in England and Wales for each year from 1979–80 is set out in the table at 1996–97 prices. These figures include expenditure borne on the Property Services Agency vote up to 1987–88 for the capital costs of new prisons. Because of the nature of the Government accounting system, some other costs attributable to the running of the prison system, for example superannuation, rates and common services, were charged to other votes during some of the earlier years in the table.

	£ million
1979–80	790.5
1980–81	898.6
1981–82	900.2
1982–83	949.5
1983–84	1,002.0
1984–85	1,022.7
1985–86	1,070.6
1986–87	1,105.0
1987–88	1,167.9
1988–89	1,284.1
1989–90	1,482.4
1990–91	1,640.1
1991–92	1,680.3
1992–93	1,621.6
1993–94	1,617.1
1994–95	1,687.1
1995–96	1,712.9
1996–97 (provisional)	1,604.9

Police Force (Government Spending)

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by how much in real terms Government spending on the police force has changed since 1979. [11158]

Mr. Michael: On the basis of the latest gross domestic produce deflator figures issued by the Treasury, total spending on the police in England and Wales will have increased in real terms by 100.4 per cent. between 1978–79 and 1997–98.

Police (Wales)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on each of the four Welsh police forces in each year since 1979. [11191]

Mr. Michael: The information is set out in the table.

Expenditure

£ million

	Dyfed Powys	*Gwent*	*North Wales*	*South Wales*
1978–79	7.615	8.511	11.672	26.219
1979–80	10.016	10.971	15.362	35.086
1980–81	11.698	12.826	17.233	41.527
1981–82	13.709	15.014	20.060	49.634
1982–83	15.052	16.379	22.314	55.399
1983–84	16.301	18.455	25.200	59.667
1984–85	19.134	20.120	27.838	66.756
1985–86	18.813	20.619	27.567	68.001
1986–87	20.699	22.213	30.257	72.723
1987–88	23.831	24.096	32.961	78.957
1988–89	25.293	27.170	36.812	86.312
1989–90	29.522	30.444	41.084	97.275
1990–91	30.878	33.286	44.725	106.257
1991–92	35.150	36.682	50.700	118.537
1992–93	38.896	38.965	55.897	127.300
1993–94	41.518	41.406	58.387	130.885
1994–95	44.381	42.951	61.156	130.371
1995–96	46.534	49.907	66.185	154.710
1996–97	48.813	62.752	69.339	151.524
1997–98	50.481	65.162	72.039	156.800

Information from police grant claim forms, except: 1995–96 and 1996–97—Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy estimates. 1997–98—revenue budgets and additional police grant.

Firearms Consultative Committee

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will lay before Parliament the eighth annual report of the Firearms Consultative Committee. [11516]

Mr. Michael: I have today placed a copy of the annual report of the Firearms Consultative Committee in the Library.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received the annual report for 1996 of the complaints audit committee of the immigration and nationality directorate; and if he will make a statement. [11623]

Mr. Straw: A copy of the report, publication of which was delayed by the election, has been placed in the Library. It is a wide-ranging and informative document and I am grateful to the committee for its comments and recommendations. These are already receiving careful consideration.

Probation Officers

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the future qualifications and training arrangements for new probation officers. [11816]

Mr. Straw: I hope to proceed quickly to develop a diploma in probation studies, located in higher education and combined with a national vocational qualification, which will become the qualification for new probation officers. I intend that the new arrangements should be employment led and delivered by a consortium of probation services that will manage the recruitment and selection of trainee probation officers.

The combined diploma and NVQ will offer a mixture of academic teaching and work-based supervised practice, all based on the occupational standards that will be developed for probation officers. The new qualification should be delivered through flexible teaching methods that take account of trainees' previous work, academic qualifications and experience so that a wide range of recruits can be attracted to the probation service.

I have decided that training for new probation officers should no longer be linked to social work education. I will be supporting the development of a new and separate diploma in probation studies, which will equip the probation officers of the future to play their full part in this Government's plans for an integrated approach to working with offenders. It will focus on probation's top priority role of protecting the public and reducing crime through effective work with offenders. There will, therefore, be no further funding or support from the Home Office for the diploma in social work.

These arrangements will be developed in partnership with probation service organisations and higher education institutions to provide high-quality training for high-quality recruits.

EU Framework and Workplace Directives

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the implementation of the general fire safety aspects of the EU framework and workplace directives. [11817]

Mr. George Howarth: After consulting my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, I announced on 16 July that we proposed to implement the outstanding fire safety elements of the European community framework and workplace directives. Today, I have signed and laid before Parliament the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 made under the European Communities Act 1972 to apply throughout Great Britain. A compliance cost assessment is attached to the regulations showing that the estimated costs to employers attributable to these regulations will be less than £30 million. I have placed copies of these documents in the Library. To assist employers, there will be a package of user-friendly guidance comprising a handy, free card summarising the regulations and employers' rights and a short booklet, both of which will be widely available.

The regulations take into account the views expressed in the many responses received during the consultation exercise carried out last year and the representations received since then from business interests and the fire service. I am grateful to business and fire service representatives for the assistance they have given to my officials during the drafting of the regulations and supporting guidance.

Where appropriate, the regulations have been drafted using copy-out language. This ensures that there is full compliance with the directives but that no unnecessary costs are imposed on business.

The regulations put the primary responsibility for fire safety in the workplace on employers. It is for them to determine and provide the measures they believe to be necessary to meet the risk from fire identified in their premises. In this way, what is provided will be appropriate to the risks and tailored to the specific circumstances of the workplace. The regulations incorporate a new approach to fire safety enforcement. Most significant breaches of the regulations can be dealt with by civil sanctions with the onus of proof on the fire authority rather than the employer.

However, to emphasise the importance of fire safety, criminal sanctions will remain for serious risks.

The regulations include some of the user-friendly enforcement safeguards of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. They will be enforced by the fire authority, who will use the employer's own assessment of the risk from fire as a starting point. The fire service have an important role to play. It will offer employers advice and assistance in meeting their obligations and avoiding over-provision.

The Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations will come into effect in England, Scotland and Wales on 1 December 1997 and will make explicit what is already implicit in United Kingdom law. In light of the existing general duties of care employers owe to their staff, business should, for the most part, already have in place what these regulations require of them. As standards of fire safety in the workplace are already generally high in

Great Britain, most businesses will have little to do and this is reflected in the total estimated compliance costs of less than £30 million. This is significantly lower than the previous estimate—more than £1.7 billion—associated with earlier drafts of the regulations.

Forensic Science Service

Mr. Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will lay before Parliament the annual report and accounts for the Forensic Science Service. [11818]

Mr. Straw: I have today laid before Parliament copies of the Forensic Science Service annual report and accounts for 1996–97.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Defence Sales

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the results of the review of defence sales criteria before the House rises for the summer Adjournment. [10388]

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to publish his policy statement on defence exports. [10642]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer the hon. Members to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave to my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms) on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*.

Venezuela

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Venezuelan Government took in response to the British ambassador's request for medical checks for Paul Loseby on 10 April and 10 July. [10436]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Mr. Loseby had a routine medical examination on 5 May. He has not yet seen a doctor about the specific medical concern which prompted our ambassador to write to the Venezuelan authorities. The Venezuelan court has issued an order for Mr. Loseby to be seen by a doctor, but the visit has not yet taken place.

Our consular staff will continue to press the Venezuelan authorities to organise a medical visit.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if James Miles has received medical checks since his detention in Venezuela in November. [10437]

Mr. Lloyd: James Miles received a medical check on 5 May 1997. When he was last visited by our consular staff on 9 July, Mr. Miles had no complaints about his health.

Sudan

Rev. Martyn Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between Her Majesty's Government and the Sudanese Government following the peace agreement signed in April 1997. [11122]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The April 1997 agreement contains positive elements, notably the commitments to self-determination and to respect for human rights, but the main southern group, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, is not a party. We remain concerned about Sudanese policies in three main areas; human rights, support for terrorism and the civil war, but we welcome the Sudanese Government's acceptance of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development's declaration of principles as the basis for talks with the SPLA and look forward to early negotiations. We and our EU partners fully support IGAD's efforts to bring peace to Sudan and are ready to consider any way to help that process.

Chechnya (Kidnapped Britons)

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the whereabouts of Camilla Carr and Jon James, kidnapped in Chechnya; and what steps are being taken to ensure their safety. [10957]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are concerned about the safety of Camilla Carr and Jon James. Since their abduction in Grozny on 3 July, no one has claimed responsibility. Their whereabouts are unknown. We are in touch with the Russian and Chechen authorities, who have undertaken to do what they can to help. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary expressed our concern to the Russian Foreign Minister on 14 July. Consular division is in daily contact with the families of the couple, to keep them informed of developments.

Conciliation and Arbitration Convention

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when the Government will ratify the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe convention on conciliation and arbitration; [10754]

(2) for what reasons the United Kingdom has not yet ratified the OSCE convention on conciliation and arbitration; and what objections it has raised to the convention. [10756]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Possible UK accession to the OSCE convention on conciliation and arbitration will be considered shortly. I shall write to my hon. Friend with a considered response as soon as possible thereafter.

Somali Nationals (Family Reunion)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Somali nationals applied for family reunion at the British embassy at Addis Ababa in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1996 and *(d)* 1997; and how many of these applications were (i) successful and (ii) refused. [10876]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The number of Somali nationals who applied for family reunion at the British Embassy in Addis Ababa in 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997 were as follows:

	Applications received	*Granted*	*Refused*
1994	[1]—	1,228	[1]—
1995	[1]—	654	[1]—
1996	670	359	[2]1,020
1997	366	207	[2]402

[1] The number of applications received and refused in 1994 and 1995 are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

[2] In 1996 and 1997 the refusal numbers exceed the applications received due to the build up of a large backlog from previous years.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many OSCE participating states have ratified the convention on conciliation and arbitration. [10755]

Mr. Lloyd: As at 24 July 1997, 22 of the 54 OSCE participating states had ratified or acceded to the convention on conciliation and arbitration.

Russia (Baby Seal Cull)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the British embassy in Moscow last contacted the Russian authorities about the cull of baby seals in the White sea. [10946]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The British embassy in Moscow last contacted the Russian authorities about the number of Greenland seal pups taken from the White sea on 28 May. It was advised then that the quota for the 1997 cull was broadly the same as for 1996—31,000—but that the final figure was not yet available. The embassy will approach the Russian authorities again in September.

Scientific Equipment Exports

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ban exports of scientific equipment to research institutes in *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan, *(c)* China, *(d)* Russia and *(e)* Israel suspected of nuclear weapon development; and if he will make a statement. [11015]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* It is not the intention of the present Government to embargo the export of scientific equipment to any country, other than to fulfil a binding commitment made in an international forum.

It is our policy not to grant licences for the export of items of scientific equipment controlled under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, Council Regulation (EC) 3381/94, and related Council decision 94/942/CFSP as amended, or the Dual Use and Related Goods (Export Control) Regulations 1996 as amended, where to do so would risk the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or of missiles capable of delivering them.

Russia (Religious Freedom)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he *(a)* has made and *(b)* proposes to make to the Russian Government about the restrictions of religious freedoms in Russia. [10764]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We are acting in concert with our EU partners.

The EU troika ambassadors in Moscow carried out a démarche on Mr. Sidorov, the Deputy Foreign Minister, on 9 July. The démarche called upon President Yeltsin not to allow the law to come into effect in its present form. He vetoed it on 22 July.

We shall consider any further action in the light of developments.

Rwanda and the Congo

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards the entry of Rwanda into the Commonwealth. [10797]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Decisions on membership are taken by Commonwealth Heads of Government on the basis of consensus. The Heads of Government meeting in Edinburgh will consider a report on Commonwealth membership criteria and look at Rwanda's application in the light of this. We believe that among other conditions, it is important for any applicant to the Commonwealth to have had a former constitutional link with a Commonwealth country and to comply with the Harare declaration on human rights and democracy.

Mr. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards military assistance to *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [10796]

Mr. Lloyd: We do not at present provide any military assistance to Rwanda or to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's military assistance to *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the last three years. [10798]

Mr. Lloyd: We have provided no military assistance to Rwanda or the Demcratic Republic of the Congo in the last three years.

Mr. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support the Government have given to private companies investing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the last two months. [10799]

Mr. Lloyd: I met a number of UK private companies who have experience of the great lakes region on 17 June, to discuss commercial prospects in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This Department and the Department of Trade and Industry continue to advise British business on possible commercial opportunities.

British Council

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the real terms change in the Government grant in aid to the British Council between 1979 and 1997. [11260]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The real terms change in this Department's grant in aid to the British Council between 1978–79 and 1997–98 was an increase of 21 per cent. This does not take into account the grant in aid received by the British Council from the Department for International Development—formerly the Overseas Development Administration—during this period.

European Union Legislation

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the change in volume of EU legislation since 1990 as a result of application of the principle of subsidiarity. [11235]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The number of proposals for primary legislation has fallen from 61 in 1990 to 16 in the pipeline for 1997. It is clear that the principle of subsidiarity is now widely accepted, including by the Commission.

UN Arms Control Reports

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he proposes to take to make known to *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* others details of progress reports on the UN conventional arms register and the UN small arms panel which are expected to be available during the summer Adjournment. [11309]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The recommendations of the panel of experts on the UN register of conventional arms and the UN small arms panel are expected in August and will be presented to the UN Secretary-General in time for the 52nd UN General Assembly in September. We shall place a copy in the Libraries of the House as soon as they have been published.

We shall need to consider their recommendations of the panel carefully and will inform the House how we propose to take these forward.

BBC World Service

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the change in spending in real terms on the BBC World Service between 1979 and 1997. [11161]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Funding for the World Service has increased by approximately 50 per cent. in real terms since 1979.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–00; and if he will make a statement. [11389]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Estimates are given in the table. They include staff and related costs. Those for 1997–98 are based on present budgets. Figures for 1998–99 and 1999–00 are provisional.

Expenditure on information systems

Financial year	£ million Current	Capital
1995–96	[1]16.1	[1]18.7
1996–97	[1]14.8	[1]11.2
1997–98	[2]15.2	[2]26.7
1998–99	[2]15.8	[2]14.5
1999–2000	[2]16.4	[2]15.6
Total	[2]78.4	[2]86.8

[1] Actual.

[2] Planned.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Parades and Marches

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provision she will make to ensure that residents whose streets have been blocked to enable church parades, are themselves able to attend their own churches. [8775]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 July 1997]:* It is of course most regrettable if on any occasion those who wish to go to and from their chosen place of worship by their chosen route are unable to do so. It is for the Royal Ulster Constabulary to do its best to ensure that worshippers are able to get to and from their church unhindered. There are occasions, however, when the security situation in Northern Ireland causes disruption to these plans. When this happens, the RUC endeavours to keep these disruptions to the minimum necessary to meet the security requirement.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many marches were applied for in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997 up to 12 July 1997 by (i) the Orange Institution, (ii) the Black Institution, (iii) the Apprentice Boys of Derry, (iv) the Ancient Order of Hibernians and (v) the Legion of Mary; and how many took place. [9976]

Mr. Ingram: The information is not readily available in the format requested and would incur disproportionate cost to provide. I can, however, give details of the number of marches held during that period which are described as either loyalist, nationalist or other:

Marches held in 1996 and from 1 January 1997 to 12 July 1997

	1 January 1996 to 31 December 1996	*1 January 1997 to 12 July 1997*
Loyalist	2,405	1,495
Nationalist	230	112
Other	527	248

The 1997 statistics may be subject to minor adjustment.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications to march were received in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997 up to 12 July 1997 for the purposes of band parades; and how many were perceived to be (i) unionist/loyalist, (ii) nationalist/republican and (iii) neither. [9977]

Mr. Ingram: The information is not readily available in the format requested and would incur disproportionate cost to provide.

Fishery Harbour Authority

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons no appointments were made following interviews for places on the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority; and when appointments will be made. [10297]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The appointment process did not comply fully with the guidance within the code of practice for public appointments and the interviews are being rescheduled with the involvement of an independent panel member.

The Department of Agriculture hopes to fill the vacancies by early September 1997.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on Government policy on the future of the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority. [10299]

Mr. Murphy: The Government continue to regard the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority as the appropriate body to operate, maintain and develop the three fishery harbours at Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie. There are no plans to alter the statutory position of the authority.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons representing fishing interests are represented on the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority. [10298]

Mr. Murphy: There are two persons from the fishing community on the Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority.

Crime and Disorder Bill

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the provisions of the proposed Crime and Disorder Bill will extend to Northern Ireland and if she will make a statement. [10274]

Mr. Ingram: The Government are currently finalising the content of the Crime and Disorder Bill. An assessment is being made of the applicability of its provisions to Northern Ireland and the most appropriate legislative means of introducing those considered suitable.

I will ensure that hon. Members are informed when we have reached a considered view.

Judicial Reviews

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the cases of judicial review taken against her Department in 1996, indicating the name of the plaintiff, the subject, if legal aid was granted and how much in each case, and the result of the review. [10276]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This information is not readily available in the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments as no central record is kept of applications for judicial reviews.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will estimate *(a)* the number of mis-sold personal pensions in Northern Ireland and *(b)* the number of members in public sector schemes who took out such pensions; and what steps are being taken to ensure reinstatement for those who transferred out of public sector schemes. [10312]

Mr. Paul Murphy: For the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments, the information is as follows:

(a) The numbers are not available.

(b) The details requested are not held centrally, but the number of members who have opted out of public service occupational pension schemes is somewhere in the region of 2,000 to 2,500. It is not possible to be more specific nor is it possible to identify what proportion of this number switched or transferred out to personal pension providers.

In keeping with Government policy, Departments responsible for public service schemes have introduced, or are in the process of introducing, amendments which allow current employees who were victims of mis-selling to re-enter their occupational pension schemes. The amendments will also facilitate members' restoration to a financial position equivalent to what would have been the case if mis-selling had not occurred.

Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements have been made to carry out reviews of the Driver and Vehicle Testing and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland agencies. [11696]

Dr. Mowlam: Under the arrangements for quinquennial reviews for next steps agencies, it has been decided to carry out a combined review of both agencies together with the associated functions carried out by the transport licensing and enforcement branch of the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland). Consultants will shortly be invited to tender for this combined review.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful national lottery bids from the parliamentary constituency of Selby, indicating for each successful bid the value of the award, since the inception of the national lottery. [9971]

Mr. Banks: To date, more than £3.7 billion has been awarded to 24,631 projects throughout the UK. Of these 23 awards worth £1,557,916 have been made to projects in Selby. Details of these are set out in the table. The second table lists successful applications where it is possible to do so, though not all distributing bodies keep such records.

Table A: Successful applications

Distributing body	*Award date*	*Recipient*	*Project title/Desc.*	*Award Amount £*
Heritage Lottery Fund	15 May 1996	Yorkshire Wildlife Trust	Askham Bog, South West of York	16,750
	5 February 1997	St Matthews Church, Naburn PCC	St Matthews Church, Naburn—Restoration	165,000
	12 February 1997	Yorkshire Air Museum and Allied Air Forces Memorial	World War II T2 Hangar, Elvington	135,800
Heritage Lottery Fund total				317,550
Sports Council	5 June 1995	Selby Rugby Union Football	New archery range	7,820
	6 June 1995	North Yorkshire County Council	Tadcaster Grammar School floodlit artificial pitch	60,000
	7 June 1995	West Selby Miners Welfare Scheme	Multi-sport hard surface area and sand filled, floodlit artificial grass	32,136
	20 September 1995	Selby Bowling Club	Provision of two additional indoor bowling rinks and ancillary facilities	184,138
	8 January 1996	Copmanthorpe and District Recreation Centre	Proposal to build a 1 badminton court sports hall (16.5m x 9m x 8.3m) with MF indoor and outdoor changing rooms; activity room; 2 store rooms	70,000
	11 January 1996	Tadcaster Lawn Tennis Club	Complete re-building 2 hard courts which are currently not level or safe	13,779
	6 February 1996	Selby District Council	Upgrade of Tadcaster Leisure Centre (sports hall; changing facilities; fitness suite; reception; to include full access for disabled users)	206,790
	11 March 1996	Woodhouse Grange Cricket Club	Pavilion extension to include extra changing rooms; umpires room; new toilets; kitchen extension and new equipment store plus gang mowers for 2nd ground	18,452
	20 March 1996	Dunnington and Grimston Playing Fields	Extension to sports club facilities including pavilion and changing facilities	210,592
	22 April 1996	Cawood Parish Council/Cawood Tennis Club	Up-grading 3 courts for bitmac to playdeck. Up-grading/additional floodlighting 2 courts and practice wall area.	14,000
	27 November 1996	Bolton Percy Cricket Club	Upgrade of existing pitch and a new practice pitch	14,060
	5 February 1997	Selby Lawn Tennis Club	Upgrading of tennis courts and replacement of fencing	17,184
Sports Council total				848,951
National Lottery Charities Board	20 November 1995	Cygnet Housing Group	Resettlement Community Support for Ex Residents, Rent/Bond Guarantee Scheme.	44,850
	11 August 1996	Copmanthorpe Pre-School Playgroup	To purchase a versatile, collapsible playhouse to encourage communication and social development through play.	1,000
	11 August 1996	Hambleton Luncheon Club	Running costs and purchase of items used by a luncheon club for pensioners.	3,914
	17 December 1996	Multiple Sclerosis Society, Selby Branch	This one year grant will be used to purchase a specially adapted replacement mini-bus for people with multiple sclerosis who live in Selby.	29,158
	17 December 1996	Selby District Crossroads	The project is to expand the group's home-based respite care service and provide training for care attendants.	87,823

Table A: Successful applications

Distributing body	*Award date*	*Recipient*	*Project title/Desc.*	*Award Amount £*
	17 December 1996	Brunswick Organic Nursery	This group provides horticultural and craftwork daytime activities and training to adults with learning difficulties.	196,500
	17 December 1996	Selby Fuller Life Action Group	This group provides a social club for people with disabilities and their carers.	2,720
	17 December 1996	York Coronary Support Group Trust	The project will improve the physical condition and general health of coronary patients following a heart attack or heart surgery.	25,450
National Lottery Charities Board total				391,415

Table B: Unsuccessful applications

Distributing body	*Unsuccessful applicant*
Arts Council of England	Burton Salmon County Primary Friends of Selby Music Centre University of York Music Press
Heritage Lottery Fund	Streeton Hall, South Milford St. Mary the Virgin, Hemingbrough Hemingbrough Minster Restoration
English Sports Council	North Yorkshire County Council Copmanthorpe Bowls Club North Yorkshire County Council/Fulford School Whitley Bridge Cricket Club
Millennium Commission	[1]—
Charities Board	[2]24 Unsuccessful bids

[1] The Millennium Commission does not record unsuccessful projects by constituency.

[2] The Charities Board does not release details of unsuccessful bids.

Theatres

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of Government funding for theatres will be given to theatres outside London next year; and if he will make a statement. [10488]

Mr. Fisher: It is a matter for the Arts Council of England, with the 10 regional arts boards, to take decisions on the balance of funding between art forms and the support of individual arts organisations.

Live Performances

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what are the terms of reference of the Arts Council's inquiry into how to disseminate live performances from lottery funded projects to wider audiences. [10088]

Mr. Fisher: Following a review of the lottery capital programme undertaken by Adrian Ellis Associates in 1996, the Arts Council of England decided to explore the scope for wider access to performances as a result of the recording and subsequent transmission of performances in lottery funded venues.

The Arts Council commissioned a study to explore the recording of live performances of drama, music, opera and lyric theatre and dance, relating to the following issues:

Legal:

ownership of rights to recordings;

the treatment of income generated by recordings;

the impact of existing union agreement.

Technical and design issues:

design specifications for performing arts spaces;

current best practice in design guidelines;

future trends in recording.

Artistic issues:

capturing live performance through recording;

sources of artistic and production values.

Hydra Associates was commissioned by the Arts Council of England to carry out this study and it is expected to report its findings in August.

Tourism Industry

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what share of United Kingdom gross domestic product the tourism industry accounted for in *(a)* 1978–79 and *(b)* 1996–97. [10833]

Mr. Tom Clarke *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Expenditure by tourists was equivalent to between 5 and 6 per cent. of GDP in both 1978 and 1996.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people were employed in the United Kingdom tourism industry in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1996. [10834]

Mr. Clarke *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* In September 1979 there were 1.3 million people employed in tourism-related industries in Great Britain. In 1996 this figure was 1.8 million.

Film Industry

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many films for theatre distribution were made in Britain in each year since 1979. [10823]

Mr. Tom Clarke *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The number of films made for theatrical release in the United Kingdom for the years 1979–96 was as follows:

Year	*Number of films produced*
1979	61
1980	31
1981	24
1982	40
1983	51
1984	53
1985	54
1986	41
1987	55
1988	48
1989	30
1990	60
1991	59
1992	47
1993	67
1994	84
1995	78
1996	128

Source:

BFI/Screen Digest.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was the level of cinema admissions in the United Kingdom in each year since 1979. [10829]

Mr. Clarke *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The levels of cinema admissions in the United Kingdom in the film industry for the years 1979–96 were as follows:

Year	*Admissions (millions)*
1979	112
1980	101
1981	86
1982	64
1983	66
1984	54
1985	72
1986	78
1987	79
1988	84
1989	95
1990	97
1991	100
1992	103
1993	114
1994	124
1995	114
1996	124

Source:

BFI/Screen Digest.

Overseas Visitors

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many overseas visitors came to Britain in each year since 1979. [10835]

Mr. Clarke *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The number of visits made by overseas residents to the United Kingdom in each year from 1979 is as shown in the following table.

Year	*Visits made to the UK by overseas residents*
1979	12,486,000
1980	12,421,000
1981	11,452,000
1982	11,636,000
1983	12,464,000
1984	13,644,000
1985	14,449,000
1986	13,897,000
1987	15,566,000
1988	15,799,000
1989	17,338,000
1990	18,013,000
1991	17,125,000
1992	18,535,000
1993	19,863,000
1994	21,034,000
1995	24,008,000
1996	26,070,000

Source:

International Passenger Survey, Office for National Statistics.

Association of Business Sponsorship of the Arts

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the arts received from the ABSA partnership scheme in current prices in each year since its establishment. [10825]

Mr. Fisher *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The amount of public funding made available to the arts through the national heritage arts sponsorship scheme since its inception, in cash terms and at current prices, is as follows:

£ million

Year	*Pairing scheme grant (Cash)*	*Pairing scheme grant (1996–97 prices)*
1984–85	0.40	0.69
1985–96	1.25	2.04
1986–87	1.75	2.78
1987–88	1.85	2.79
1988–89	2.50	3.53
1989–90	3.00	3.96
1990–91	3.50	4.28
1991–92	3.50	4.02
1992–93	4.50	4.96
1993–94	4.50	4.82
1994–96	4.80	5.07
1995–96	5.55	5.70
1996–97	5.05	5.05

The business sponsorship incentive scheme was launched on 1 October 1994. It was relaunched in February 1995 as the national heritage arts sponsorship scheme—the "pairing scheme".

Department Name Change

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is his estimate of the total cost of renaming his Department in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99; what sums have been paid for new departmental logos or designs; and if he will make a statement. [11184]

Mr. Chris Smith: To date, costs of £400, plus VAT, have been incurred in amending the existing logo for use on departmental computers and in altering signs in the Department's headquarters. Designs for a new departmental logo and other materials are being sought with the help of the Design Council. Value for money will of course be a prime consideration in adopting new designs later this year. I do not expect any additional expenditure as a result of the name change in 1998–99.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what were the costs of changing the title of the Department of National Heritage to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. [11180]

Mr. Smith: To date, costs of £400, plus VAT, have been incurred in amending the existing logo for use on departmental computers and in altering signs in the Department's buildings.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for what reasons he did not include a reference to tourism in the new title of his Department. [11177]

Mr. Smith: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has a large number of responsibilities, not all of which could be included in the name of the Department. The tourism industry is a very important contributor to the economy of this country, and central to my Department's interests.

SCOTLAND

Pre-payment Prescriptions

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many annual prescription pre-payment certificates were purchased in Scotland in each year since 1989; how many of these were refunded during the first month of validity during each year *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total; and if he will make a statement. [7763]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 10 July 1997]:* The information requested is available for the years 1994–95 to 1996–97 only and is set out in the table below. This information is not held centrally as responsibility for the sale of prepayment certificates and any refunds claimed lies with health boards.

All aspects of Government expenditure are being scrutinised as part of the comprehensive review of Government spending. Prescription charges will be examined as part of the review process.

Year	*Number of annual prescription prepayment certificates purchased*	*Number of annual prescription prepayment certificates refunded*	*Per cent.*
1994–95	45,525	209	0.46
1995–96	45,602	233	0.51
1996–97	33,928	154	0.45

Obesity

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new initiatives his Department is planning in respect of obesity; and if he will make a statement. [8744]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 14 July 1997]:* The association of obesity with cardiovascular disease and other diseases was recognised in "Eating for Health—A Diet Action Plan for Scotland", implementation of which is now in train. Further action to improve diet in Scotland will be informed by data from the Scottish health survey, which will be published shortly.

Domestic Home Care

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision each council has made for new clients to receive domestic home care in the current year expressed as hours of support available. [9614]

Mr. Galbraith: The information requested is not available centrally.

Homosexuals (Age of Consent)

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce legislation to create an equal age of consent for heterosexual and homosexual relationships. [9220]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 21 July 1997]:* The Government have long held the view that this is a matter for Parliament to decide on the basis of a free vote.

Asthma

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the net ingredient cost for preparations used in treatment of asthma, in total and per health authority, for each of the last four years. [10224]

Mr. Galbraith: The information by health board and Scotland for financial years 1993–94 to 1996–97 is set out in the table. The costs shown are based on the value of ingredients before the addition of dispensing fees or deduction of any discount or patient charges.

The cost relates to inhaled and oral adrenoceptor stimulants, inhaled steroids, inhaled antimuscarinic bronchodilators and theophylline preparations.

	Cost £ million			
Health board	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Argyll and Clyde	3.206	3.575	3.867	4.120
Ayrshire and Arran	3.470	3.972	4.373	4.665
Borders	0.880	0.949	0.999	1.036
Dumfries and Galloway	1.078	1.195	1.293	[illegible].412
Fife	2.377	2.627	2.892	3.122
Forth Valley	2.004	2.275	2.490	2.697
Grampian	3.546	3.960	4.337	4.643
Greater Glasgow	7.198	8.099	8.841	9.251
Highland	1.248	1.401	1.557	1.752
Lanarkshire	4.448	5.074	5.706	6.050
Lothian	5.237	5.652	6.091	6.461
Orkney	0.109	0.130	0.144	0.149
Shetland	0.100	0.111	0.128	0.141
Tayside	3.435	3.936	4.388	4.741
Western Isles	0.142	0.172	0.201	0.215
Scotland	38.478	43.128	47.307	50.455

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of prescriptions for the treatment of asthma, in total and per health authority, for each of the last four years. [10225]

Mr. Galbraith: This information by health board and Scotland for the financial years 1993–94 to 1996–97 is set out in the table.

The numbers relate only to inhaled and oral adrenoceptor stimulants, inhaled steroids, inhaled antimuscarinic bronchodilators and theophylline preparations.

Number of prescription items

thousands

Health board	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Argyll and Clyde	292	307	319	324
Ayrshire and Arran	294	312	321	322
Borders	79	83	85	86
Dumfries and Galloway	107	116	119	123
Fife	220	231	239	246
Forth Valley	190	199	205	209
Grampian	314	331	343	349
Greater Glasgow	675	709	736	747
Highland	123	130	136	139
Lanarkshire	413	434	459	467
Lothian	449	465	481	482
Orkney	10	11	12	12
Shetland	13	13	14	14
Tayside	274	286	293	298
Western Isles	16	17	18	18
Scotland	3,469	3,644	3,780	3,836

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the cost to the NHS of providing acute care to adults suffering from occupational asthma attacks in each of the last five financial years; [10226]

(2) what was the cost to the NHS of treating adult occupational asthma sufferers, in each year since 1989–90; [10227]

(3) what was the NHS expenditure on the treatment of asthma, in the last year for which figures are available; and what proportion of the total NHS budget this represents; [10231]

(4) if he will provide a breakdown of NHS expenditure on the treatment of asthma in the last year for which figures are available; and what proportion of this expenditure was on prescriptions. [10232]

Mr. Galbraith: I regret that the information currently available from health boards and NHS trusts does not separately identify the cost of treating patients suffering from occupational asthma. The statistics we do collect indicate that the estimated cost of hospital care for asthma to be in the region of £7.5 million for the year 1995–96. This is 0.17 per cent. of the total NHS budget. Unfortunately, there is no information available on the cost of treating asthma in the community/primary care setting. Expenditure on ingredient cost for drugs used in the treatment of asthma is £47.3 million, again for the year 1995–96.

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the estimated loss of time from work caused by asthma in the last year for which figures are available. [10228]

Mr. Galbraith: This information is not collected by The Scottish Office. However, of some 25,000 employed adults from every part of the UK who responded to a survey conducted for the National Asthma Campaign in 1996, about time off due to asthma in the last 12 months, the following percentages were:

	Per cent.
Not able to work at all	9.0
More than five weeks off work	4.0
Three–four weeks off work	4.5
One–two weeks off work	7.5
Four–seven days off work	9.0
One–three days off work	15.0
Never off due to asthma	51.0

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the expenditure on general practitioner prescribed anti-asthma medication and preparations in each health authority broken down to show *(a)* net ingredient costs and *(b)* net ingredient costs per capita in the last year for which figures are available. [10229]

Mr. Galbraith: The information by health board and for Scotland for the financial year 1996–97 is set out in the table. The costs shown are based on the value of the ingredients before the addition of dispensing fees or the deduction of any discount or patient charges.

The cost relates only to inhaled and oral adrenoceptor stimulants, inhaled steroids, inhaled antimuscarinic bronchodilators and theophylline preparations.

Health board	*Cost of medication £ million*	*Cost per patient on GP list (£)*
Argyll and Clyde	4.120	9.39
Ayrshire and Arran	4.665	11.91
Borders	1.036	9.56
Dumfries and Galloway	1.412	9.21
Fife	3.121	8.80
Forth Valley	2.697	9.27
Grampian	4.643	8.59
Greater Glasgow	9.251	9.33
Highland	1.752	8.15
Lanarkshire	6.050	10.32
Lothian	6.461	7.93
Orkney	0.149	7.38
Shetland	0.141	6.12
Tayside	4.741	11.57
Western Isles	0.215	7.27
Scotland	50.455	9.40

Kidney Transplants

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of patients awaiting kidney transplants on NHS lists in Scotland in each of the last 10 years. [10599]

Mr. Galbraith: Because of the way the data are collected by the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority, it is not possible to give the information in exactly the form requested. The table shows the number of patients on the active waiting list at hospitals in Scotland for a kidney transplant at the end of each year from 1990 onwards:

Year	*Number on waiting list*
1990	386
1991	416
1992	412
1993	442
1994	413
1995	442
1996	482

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many kidney transplant operations were undertaken in each of the last 10 years. [10600]

Mr. Galbraith: The information is set out in the table.

Year	*Number of transplants*
1987	75
1988	119
1989	170
1990	184
1991	139
1992	161
1993	155
1994	170
1995	146
1996	142

Intensive Care Beds

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many intensive care beds were available in NHS hospitals in Scotland in each of the last 10 years. [10597]

Mr. Galbraith: The information requested is given in the table.

Year ending 31 March	*Number of intensive care beds*[1]
1988	166
1989	182
1990	189
1991	198
1992	219
1993	230
1994	250
1995	247
1996	266
1997[2]	303

[1] Figures for the years 1988 to 1996 show the average available staffed beds in the specialty of intensive therapy unit. The figure for 1997 shows the average staffed beds in facilities of intensive care unit and cardiac care unit and is not fully comparable with those shown for earlier years.

[2] Provisional.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the degree of correlation between the number of intensive care beds available within the NHS in Scotland and the number of organs available for transplant. [10598]

Mr. Galbraith: The relationship between intensive care beds and organ donation is complex, but there is no evidence to suggest that the number of intensive care beds in Scotland is a constraint on organ transplantation programmes. As one of a number of issues designed to increase organ donation awareness amongst staff in intensive care units, The Scottish Office Department of Health has funded publication and dissemination to ITUs of the protocols for retrieval of organs. In recognition of the current shortage of organs for transplantation, the acute services review being undertaken by The Scottish Office Department of Health is investigating organ donation and kidney transplantation.

Quangos

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the quangos within his Department's responsibility which he has to date announced his intention *(a)* to abolish and *(b)* to make subject to a significant element of democratic accountability. [9676]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* My Department will be participating in the review of quangos, with a view to reducing their number, which was announced to the House on 4 June, *Official Report,* column *192,* and in consideration of measures towards greater democratic accountability which will be addressed in the forthcoming White Paper on better government to be published by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. I have already announced a review of the Scottish water industry with a view to returning the Scottish water authorities to local democratic control.

Scottish Parliament White Paper

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the measures relating to the environment contained in the White Paper on the powers of a Scottish Parliament. [9374]

Mr. McLeish: As my right hon. Friend made clear in his statement to the House on 24 July, *Official Report,* columns *1041-63,* matters relating to the environment will be devolved.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the Adjournment debate of 23 July, *Official Report,* columns 994–1022, how many senior officials of the Crown Office have been involved in the Lockerbie case since *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1991, *(c)* 1993 and *(d)* 1995. [11076]

Mr. McLeish: Different officials of the Crown Office and the Procurator Fiscal Service have been involved at different times. Between 1989 and 1991 not less than three, but at one stage four, senior officials were involved in the case and between 1993 and 1996 two senior officials were involved in the case on a day to day basis. At present three senior officials are involved in the Lockerbie case on a day to day basis.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the Adjournment debate of 23 July, *Official Report,* columns 994–1022, how many visits have been made in (i) May, (ii) June and (iii) July *(a)* to Frankfurt and *(b)* to the office of the public prosecutor by the Dumfries and Galloway constabulary. [11075]

Mr. McLeish: None.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the Adjournment debate of 23 July, *Official Report*, columns 994–1022, if the reference by the Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution to sundry third parties covers (i) the Scottish Lords of Appeal in Ordinary, (ii) Judge David Edward QC, (iii) judges of the Court of Appeal in England and (iv) judges in the European Community. [11074]

Mr. McLeish: I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend on 23 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns 994–1022.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what information is collated by her Department as to the geographic allocations of ATP. [9695]

Clare Short: All projects are listed under the relevant recipient country. Other headings include the project title, the company undertaking the project, the year the agreement was concluded, the export value and the ATP value. Lists of all projects since the inception of ATP have been deposited in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will ensure that the interaction of changes in the allocation of ATP arising from any review with adverse sterling exchange rate movements is assessed prior to final decisions being taken on the ATP programme. [9697]

Clare Short: We will ensure that any effects of sterling exchange rate movements are taken into account during the review on the aid and trade provision currently being undertaken.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many ATP allocations and at what cost have been made in each of the last two years banded by amount. [9694]

Clare Short: Eight ATP agreements were concluded in 1995 with a total ATP value of £48.018 million. Another eight agreements were concluded in 1996 with a total ATP value of £30.518 million. A list of relevant projects has been deposited in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the nature of the projects by type which were supported by ATP in the last two years. [9696]

Clare Short: In 1995, agreements were concluded for three power, four transport and one water sector projects supported under ATP. In 1996, agreements were concluded for two education, four transport and one water sector projects and one project with a number of components involving more than one sector. A list of all projects has been deposited in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which her Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10747]

Clare Short: My Department has on-line payroll system supplied under contract by the Ministry of Defence's Pay and Personnel Agency. The total cost in 1996–97 was £47,400.

We have an in-house payroll system which processes the pay and allowances of technical co-operation officers serving under the aid programme in overseas countries. The cost of the systems and processes in 1996–97 was £64,500.

Wild Animal Habitats

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what policies her Department has to promote the protection of habitats for wild animals in the developing world. [11006]

Clare Short: My Department aims to improve the livelihoods of the rural poor through the sustainable use and management of wildlife resources and habitats. Our conservation and wildlife activities are therefore developed with particular reference to rural people and their needs in the context of sustainable resource management.

We assist developing countries to maintain wildlife reserves and protect habitats and wildlife through better management and training. Recently we have also encouraged the management by local communities of habitats and wildlife.

We work with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on the convention on biological diversity and assistance to other countries on their plans, strategies and activities for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. We provide support through the bilateral development assistance programme and are responsible for UK contribution to the global environment facility, which is the interim financial mechanism for the biodiversity convention.

We have also recently agreed to help the European Commission to develop guidelines on the conservation of wildlife and management of protected areas in co-operation with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Fresh Water Management

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she will take to facilitate progress in international co-operation on a policy for fresh water management. [9349]

Clare Short: We fully recognise the importance of sustainable fresh water management, the rapidly increasing pressure on the resource and that water is a basic requirement for life.

My Department, with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is actively involved in an EU initiative to promote a more strategic approach to fresh water management, which will be considered during the next session of the UN commission on sustainable development in 1998. We will use the UK's EU presidency to promote this initiative. The UK also plays a leading role in the global water partnership, which promotes co-operation and improved water management as well as in other international forums.

We recognise that the critical actions must be at the basin level, be that local, national or regional, and that international co-operation needs to focus on promoting and supporting sound management principles and raising awareness.

Rwanda and Congo

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what are the levels of UK Government aid to *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the current financial year. [10800]

Clare Short: Since April 1997, we have disbursed £1 million to Rwanda and almost £0.5 million to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in bilateral emergency and rehabilitation assistance. We expect to provide a further £4.9 million to Rwanda in 1997–98 to help fulfil a pledge of £8 million made in 1996. We shall continue to provide emergency assistance to Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo as needs arise. Britain has also provided £95 million to the region since 1994 through the EU.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding is presently committed from her departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–00 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and whether she will make a statement. [11377]

Clare Short: Funding committed to resolving the year 2000 problem is as follows:

1997–98

£145,000, consisting of £100,000 for purchasing assistance and £45,000 of departmental staff time working on year 2000 issues.

1998–99

£65,000 of departmental staff time testing changes.

1999–00

None.

The Department for International Development has already commenced the task of making its corporate systems ready for the year 2000. These systems have been changed, or will be by November 1997, and changes tested by October 1998. Problems with other, smaller, departmental systems have been identified. Costs of correcting these will be met from the £100,000 in the 1997–98 budget. Estimates for external help in 1998–99 have not yet been made but they are unlikely to be significantly higher than in 1997–98.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is her estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–00; and if she will make a statement. [11381]

Clare Short: The total actual and estimated future capital and associated administration costs of computer-related work for the years in question is as follows:

£ million

Year and amount	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1098–99*	*1999–00*
Capital	2.1	6.1	3.0	3.0	3.0
Recurrent	0.5	1.8	1.4	0.6	0.6
Total	2.6	7.9	4.4	3.6	3.6

The development and maintenance of information systems is essential for the continued effective administration of the aid programme. Capital expenditure on computer-related work was relatively high in 1996–97 because of the need to replace obsolescent equipment, the introduction of Windows and the introduction of the systems required for resource accounting and budgeting. Recurrent expenditure in 1996–97 and 1997–98 is relatively high because of the costs of training staff in the operation of the new systems. Among other things, the new systems will facilitate improved communications and lead to better access to information.

Central Europe (Flooding)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid her Department has given to central European countries in respect of the recent flooding *(a)* for immediate relief and *(b)* for reconstruction; and what expert (i) military and (ii) civilian personnel Her Majesty's Government have provided. [11119]

Clare Short: The UK has provided £100,000 and £60,000 in response to the floods in Poland and the Czech Republic respectively for medical supplies, food, hygiene parcels, drinking water, blankets and detergents. We have no plans for bilateral assistance towards reconstruction in the flood affected countries of central Europe.

The possible use of military and civil defence assets to assist the relief effort is being co-ordinated by the United Nations department of humanitarian affairs. Offers of UK civil support are being considered.

DEFENCE

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what directions he has given to the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency in respect of replies to parliamentary questions. [8009]

Mr. Spellar: The chief executive of the Defence Research Agency is required to answer parliamentary questions in accordance with Government policy and Departmental instructions and guidance. I am placing a copy of the departmental instructions in the Library of the House.

Departmental Budgets

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, following the recent Budget, he will give his estimate of the total real level of his Department's budget, in 1995–96 prices, in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99; if he will estimate what such figures were for (1) 1997–98 and (2) 1998–99 following the November 1996 Budget on the basis of the estimates of the GDP deflator contained in that Budget; and if he will make a statement. [8301]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 14 July 1997]:* The information is as shown in the following table:

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*
Current spending plans (cash)	21,822	22,276
Plans at 1995–96 prices (July 1997 GDP deflators)	20,668	20,533
Plans at 1995–96 prices (November 1996 GDP deflators)	20,872	20,889

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new plans he has to introduce cuts and savings in his Department as a result of the effect on his Department's budgets for 1997–98 and 1998–99 of the upward revisions to the GDP deflator in the Budget on 2 July; and if he will make a statement. [8302]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 14 July 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *14*.

UK–US Joint Strike Fighter Project

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if consideration of the continued participation in, and future purchase of, the United Kingdom/American joint strike fighter project will form part of the strategic defence review. [9517]

Mr. Spellar: Yes.

Nuclear Accidents

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the procedures for informing foreign Governments if an accident involving British-controlled nuclear weapons had happened on their soil, or within their territorial waters, before 26 September 1986. [10402]

Dr. Reid: If it had ever been necessary to inform a foreign Government of an accident involving a UK nuclear weapon we would have employed normal diplomatic procedures and bilateral defence contacts under the auspices of arrangements governing the stationing of UK forces. The ratification of the International Atomic Energy Agency convention on early notification of a nuclear accident on 26 September 1986 gave formal acknowledgement to the procedures which we would have adopted.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors led his Department to compile a central record of accidents involving nuclear weapons controlled by Britain or the USA on British territory in 1993. [10401]

Dr. Reid: The creation of such a record followed a specific recommendation contained in the report by Professor Sir Ronald Oxburgh on the safety of UK nuclear weapons, published in July, 1992. A copy of the report was placed in the Library of the House at the time.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which hospitals have been designated since 1967 to treat casualties following an accident involving British-controlled nuclear weapons *(a)* on Ministry of Defence land and *(b)* elsewhere. [10947]

Dr. Reid: There are and have been no hospitals specifically designated to receive casualties following a nuclear weapon accident. Decisions on the hospitals to be used would be a matter for the responding ambulance service in consultation with the hospitals.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what circumstances staff from the atomic weapons establishment, Aldermaston are sent to investigate an accident involving British-controlled nuclear weapons. [10945]

Mr. Spellar: The atomic weapons establishment would deploy a team of technical, scientific and other support specialists to the area of an accident involving a British nuclear weapon in response to a request from the Ministry of Defence's nuclear accident response organisation.

Armed Forces (Northern Ireland)

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the current levels of armed forces personnel will be maintained in Northern Ireland following the announcement of the IRA ceasefire. [10559]

Dr. Reid: Force levels are kept under regular review to ensure that they are matched to the degree of support the Royal Ulster Constabulary needs. For the time being they are being maintained at current levels.

Services Museums

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the services museums are housed in his Department's properties. [10752]

Dr. Reid: The following 33 regimental and corps museums are located on Ministry of Defence property:

Royal Dragoon Guards
King's Royal Hussars (Winchester)
Royal Armoured Corps and Royal Tank Regiment
Royal Regiment of Artillery
Corps of Royal Engineers
Royal Corps of Signals
Foot Guards
Royal Highland Fusiliers
Black Watch
Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (Winchester)
Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (Bury)
Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire
Devonshire and Dorset Regiment
Cheshire Regiment
Royal Regiment of Wales (Brecon)
Royal Gloucester, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment (Gloucester)
Staffordshire Regiment
Light Infantry (Winchester and Bodmin)
Royal Irish Regiment (Ballymena and Armagh)
Royal Green Jackets
Parachute Regiment
Gurkhas
Royal Army Medical Corps
Royal Army Dental Corps
Queen Alexandra's Royai Army Nursing Corps
Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
Royal Army Chaplains Department
Adjutant General's Corps (Royal Military Police)
Army Physical Training Corps
Household Cavalry
Royal Logistic Corps.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's continued funding for services museums. [10748]

Dr. Reid: My Department is acutely aware of the need to maintain a network of regimental and corps museums as instruments for projecting a positive image of the Army to the public and to underpin the Army's esprit de corps. An Army museums panel has recently been constituted whose responsibilities include reviewing the allocation of public funds that are applied to the operation of these museums.

Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which *(a)* scientific journals and *(b)* other open publications staff from the atomic weapons establishment at Aldermaston have published papers since 1992; and if he will list the dates on which the papers appeared in each of the journals and publications. [10948]

Mr. Spellar: Since 1992 staff from the atomic weapons establishment at Aldermaston have published papers in the following scientific journals and other publications.

1992

Applied Radiation and Isotopes Volume 43 number 1–2
Engineering Management Journal Volume 2, number 6
Fusion Technology Volume 21 number 2
Geophysical Journal International Volume 108 number 1, Volume 110 number 1
IEEE Transaction on Nuclear Science Volume 39.5
Journal of Geophysical Research, Volume 97, B 10
Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research Volume A317
Plasma Physics and Controlled Fusion Volume 34 number 13
Proceedings of IEEE Volume 80 number 6
Science Progress Volume 76, number 299
Thermochimica Acta Volume 221
Proceedings—9th Topical conference on high-temperature plasma diagnostics
Proceedings—Workshop, Physics of compressible turbulent mixing

1993

British Ceramics Transactions Volume 92 number 1
Electronic Letters Volume 29 number 3
Geophysical Journal International Volume 114 number 2
Glass Technology Volume 34 number 3
Journal of Materials Science Volume 27 number 28 number 11
Journal of Phase Equilibria Volume 14 number 2
Journal of Quantitative Spectroscopy and Radiactive Transfer Volume 51 number 1–2
Journal of Radioanalytical and Nuclear Chemistry Volume 172:2
Radiation Protection Dosimetry Volume 46 number 4
Thermochimica Acta Volume 217

1994

Applied Radiation and Isotopes
Journal of Materials Science Volume 29 number 24
Journal of Nuclear materials Volume 28 number 1–2
Journal of Vacuum Science and Technology Volume 12.5
Laser and Particle Beams Volume 12 number 4
Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research Volume A339
Optics Letters Volume 19 number 6
Physical Review E Volume 49
Proceedings of the SPIE (International Society for Optical Engineering) Volumes 2114, 2273
Radiation Protection Dosimetry Volume 53 1–4, 55 1
Radiological Protection Bulletin (UK) Volume 150
AIP Conference Proceedings Volume 309
Proceedings, 23rd DOE/NRC Nuclear Air Cleaning Conference
Proceedings—Symposium on radiations and their effects on component and systems
Proceedings—Symposium on the non-proliferation experiment results and implications for test ban treaties.

1995

Advances in Science and Technology Vol. 3c
Applied Optics Vol. 34 no 20
Fusion Technology Vol. 28 no 3
IEE Proceedings—Microwaves, Antennas and propagation Vol. 142. No 1
International Journal of Impact Engineering Vol. 17 no 1–3

Journal de Physique IV Vol. 5 No c4

Journal of Materials Science Col. 30 no 4

Journal of Quantitative Spectroscopy and Radiative Transfer Vol. 54 No 1-2

Journal of Radioanalytical and Nuclear Chemistry V 198:1

Nuclear Materials Management Vol. 24

Proceedings of the SPIE (International Society for Optical Engineering) Vol. 2633

Radiochimcia Acta Vol. 69:4

Proceedings 36th annual meeting, Institute for Nuclear materials Management

Proceedings—IEE Colloquium, Pulsed Power

Institute of Physics Conference series Vol. 140

Key Engineering Materials Vol. 108-110

Laser Interaction with Matter, 23rd European Conference Proceedings

Proceedings, Conference on Electronics Beam Melting and Refining

Proceedings, 5th International Conference, Nuclear Criticality Safety

Proceedings 31st International MATADOR Conference

Conference proceedings, Superplastics—60 years

1996

Geophysical Journal International Vol. 123. No 2

Journal of the Chemical Society No 5

Journal of Materials Science Vol. 31 No 5

Journal of Radiological Protection Vol. 16:4

Laser and Particle Beams Vol. 14 no 2

Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research Vol. A369

Physical Review E Vol. 54:5

Physics of the Earth and Planetary Interiors Vol. 96 no 4

Proceeding of the SPIE (International Society for Optical Engineering) Vols. 2870, 2714

Propellants, Explosives, Pyrotechnics Vol 21 no 1

Proceedings 12th International Conference, Laser interaction and related plasma phenomena

Proceedings 24th European Conference on laser interaction with matter

AIP Conference Proceedings Vol. 370

Proceedings—IEE Colloquium, Pulser Power

1997

Geophysical Journal International Vol. 128. No 3

Geophysical Journal International Vol. 129, No 3

Review of Scientific Instruments Vol. 68, no PTA

Proceedings—IEE Colloquium, Pulsed Power

Records

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will open for public inspection the file with the classmark AIR 2/16857 at the Public Record Office. [10949]

Mr. Spellar: AIR 2/16857 has recently been reviewed as part of the Ministry of Defence's on-going review of records closed for more than 30 years. Sensitivity having lapsed sufficiently, arrangements are at an advanced stage to transfer the file into the custody of the Public Record Office.

Brigadier Michael Calvert

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the court martial of Brigadier Michael Calvert. [10941]

Dr. Reid: Major Calvert was tried by general court martial in Hanover in July 1952. He was found guilty of three charges relating to indecency and was dismissed from Her Majesty's service. The case was subsequently referred to the Court Martial Appeal Court, at which Major Calvert was represented by Queen's Counsel. The appeal was dismissed on 11 May 1953.

Submarine Crews (Travel Arrangements)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances his Department has made bookings abroad for Royal Navy submarine crews via private travel agencies; and if such arrangements have been made in respect of Trident submarine crews. [10315]

Dr. Reid: When accommodation is required abroad for visiting submarine crews, including those of Trident submarines, arrangements are usually made through selected private travel agencies. An individual posing as a naval officer recently obtained unauthorised information from one such agency in Faslane. The incident was reported to the appropriate authorities and is being investigated.

Conventional Submarines

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has for phasing out conventional submarines; and over what time scale. [10996]

Dr. Reid: We have no conventional submarines in service. The withdrawal from service of the RN's most recent class of conventional submarine, the Upholder class, was completed in 1994. The Royal Navy's submarine flotilla currently comprises 12 Swiftsure and Trafalgar class nuclear-powered submarines.

Strategic Defence Review

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what present military deployments are as a result of international treaty obligations; and if these deployments form part of the strategic defence review; [10998]

(2) what treaty obligations are exempt from the strategic defence review. [10938]

Dr. Reid: The strategic defence review is being conducted in accordance with the policies set out in the Government's election manifesto, including continuing co-operation with the United States, our European allies and other like-minded nations, and security built on the principle of collective defence. No United Kingdom forces are currently deployed on operations as a result of international treaty obligations. All deployments will, however, be examined during the review.

Animal Experimentation (Gulf War Syndrome)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tests will be conducted on animals during his Department's research into Gulf war syndrome; and which animals will be tested. [11000]

Dr. Reid: A document outlining the strategy of the research and a proposed work programme has been drafted by CBD Porton Down. The programme of work has yet to be agreed with MOD and, therefore, it is not yet possible to detail precisely the tests that will be conducted using animals.

Reserve Forces (Cost)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 21 July, *Official Report*, column *401*, what is the current cost of the reserve forces, by type. [11023]

Dr. Reid: The information for financial year 1996–97 is in the table. These figures exclude provision for those items whose costs cannot be identified separately from those purchased for the regular services.

£ million

	Cost
Royal Fleet Reserve	0.04
Royal Naval Reserve	17.51
Royal Marines Reserve	8.33
Army Reserve	0.58
Territorial Army	335.95
Royal Air Force Reserve	0.40
Royal Auxiliary Air Force	8.40

Departmental Land

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much of the land held by his Department has not been used in the last year. [11001]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Aircraft Stationing (Germany)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what facilities the German Government have offered for the permanent stationing of RAF aircraft. [10997]

Dr. Reid: Accommodation requirements arising out of the stationing of the RAF, or indeed other British forces, in Germany are met by the German Government in accordance with the NATO status of forces agreement. Those requirements are notified to the German Government and agreement reached with them on the provision and use of that accommodation, which then remains at the disposal of British forces until it is no longer required. The responsibility therefore rests with the British forces to make the initial approach to the German Government. As reflected in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996," Cm 3223, the RAF is to withdraw from RAF Laarbruch in 1999 and from RAF Bruggen in 2002, after which there will be no RAF aircraft permanently stationed in Germany.

Gurkha Regiment

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his plans for the Gurkha regiment. [10999]

Dr. Reid: Currently, the first battalion Royal Gurkha Rifles is serving as part of the joint rapid deployment force in 5 Airborne Brigade; other elements units support the Field Army in the United Kingdom. The second battalion Royal Gurkha Rifles is deployed as the Brunei garrison. The strategic defence review, launched on 28 May, will decide how our armed forces should be structured, equipped and deployed to meet out nation's interests and commitments. It would be premature to assess the likely outcome of the review before the process is complete.

Military Bands

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel are members of military bands of the *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* Army, *(c)* RAF and *(d)* Royal Marines. [11169]

Mr. Spellar: The number of personnel who were members of military bands as at 1 July 1997—the latest figures available—was:

	Number
(a) Royal Navy	0
(b) Army	1,139
(c) RAF	204
(d) Royal Marines	295
Total	1,638

Additionally, there are 864 personnel serving in Territorial Army bands. These are not fully funded, but receive grants from public funds.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military bands in the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy, *(c)* RAF and *(d)* Royal Marines are fully funded by his Department. [11168]

Mr. Spellar: There are 30 Regular Army, five Royal Marines and four RAF bands that are fully funded by my Department. The Royal Navy as such does not have any fully funded bands, but uses the Royal Marines bands for ceremonial and other occasions.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost to his Department of maintaining the military bands of the *(a)* Navy, *(b)* Army, *(c)* RAF and *(d)* Royal Marines. [11170]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Worthy Down

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the cost of running the Worthy Down training centre in 1996–97; what is the projected cost for 1997–98; what types of training courses it offered; how many participants there were on these courses in 1996–97; and what are the projected numbers for 1997–98; [11300]

(2) what is the current asset value of Worthy Down; what is the cost per trainee of providing each type of training course at Worthy Down; what steps his Department has taken to market test the provision of training currently provided at Worthy Down; and if he will publish his Department's studies into the value for money of training at this establishment. [11301]

Dr. Reid: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–00; and if he will make a statement. [11393]

Mr. Spellar: The estimated departmental expenditure on major and medium scale computer-related systems and their associated communications capabilities, including planned capital expenditure and operating costs, but excluding manpower costs, is:

	£ million
1995–96	Figures not centrally collated
1996–97	1,130
1997–98	941
1998–99	1,030
1999–00	997

These figures do not include the cost of minor purchases made under local financial delegated powers, which are not collated centrally and could be obtained only through a major survey at disproportionate cost.

The Department places great importance on the exploitation of computer-related systems to improve both military effectiveness and administrative efficiency.

Arms Exports

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the United Kingdom's share of the international arms export market in each year since 1979. [11264]

Mr. Spellar: Detailed records of the UK's share of the world defence export market have been maintained only since 1988. Defence export orders placed with British industry since then have represented the following estimated share of the world market:

1988: 11 per cent.
1989: 14 per cent.
1990: 14 per cent.
1991: 17 per cent.
1992: 20 per cent.
1993: 17 per cent.
1994: 16 per cent.
1995: 19 per cent.
1996: 25 per cent.

Armed Forces Pay Bill

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the real terms change in the armed forces pay bill between 1979 and 1997. [11255]

Dr. Reid: Measuring the movement in earnings in the armed forces between 1979 and 1997 by reference to real terms changes to the annual pay bill over the same period would not produce an appropriate comparison because of reductions in the strength of the armed forces. However, a comparison of the overall annual percentage increases in the total pay bill of the armed forces since 1979, with the corresponding increases in the retail prices index for 1979 to 1997, shows that in real terms the former has risen against the latter by 35.4 per cent. This takes account of staging of pay awards where they have occurred, but does not of course reflect a universally applicable figure for any given rank.

Training

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many training establishments exist for initial training; at which locations; how many personnel have been trained at each in the last year; and at what cost. [10993]

Dr. Reid: The information requested is as follows. In all cases the costs quoted have been rounded to the nearest £ million.

Royal Navy

Training establishment and location	*Numbers trained in financial year 1996–97*	*Cost £ million financial year 1996–97*
Britannia Royal Naval College Dartmouth Devon (New Entry RN Officer Training)	229	11
HMS Raleigh Torpoint Cornwall (New Entry RN Recruit Training)	2,077	21

1. The personnel figures are the number of new entrants who completed training successfully.
2. BRNC's and HMS Raleigh's activities are not confined to new entry training but include other training for their own personnel, foreign and Commonwealth service personnel and cadet forces. Separate identification of new entry training could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The costs given are the establishment costs which take account of receipts in respect of foreign and Commonwealth training.
3. The costs exclude trainees' pay.

Royal Marines

Training establishment and location	*Numbers trained in financial year 1996–97*	*Cost £ million financial year 1996–97*
Royal Marines School of Music Gibraltar block HMS Nelson Portsmouth Hampshire (RM New Entry Musician Training)	40	1
Commando Training Centre Royal Marines Lympstone Near Exmouth Devon (RM Young Officer and Recruit Training)	383	23

1. The personnel figures are the number of new entrants who completed their training successfully.
2. The costs are presented at full cost level. The costs exclude trainees' pay but account for young officers and recruits who failed to meet the standard.
3. Due to reductions in the size of the RM band service there was a temporary reduction in the requirement for trainees during 1996–97 at the Royal Marines school of music. The requirement during 1997–98 has risen to 58 trainees; 60 is the number which is normally budgeted for on an annual basis. It should be noted that the forecast requirement for 1998–99 is 75 trainees.

Army

Training establishment and location	*Numbers trained in financial year 1996–97*	*Cost £ million financial year 1996–97*
ATR Pirbright	3,023	12
ATR Glencorse	979	5
ATR Bassingbourne	2,075	9
ATR Lichfield	1,133	6
ATR Winchester	1,558	7
Army Apprentices College, Arborfield	580	7

1. In addition, apprentices are trained at the Army school of catering, Aldershot where 148 apprentices passed out in financial year 1996–97, and the apprentices training wing, royal school of military engineering, Minley, where the numbers were 213. In both these last two cases, costs could be isolated from the general running costs of the establishments only at disproportionate cost.
2. The costs shown are those for running the whole establishment, which will include some non-training costs.
3. The costs exclude trainees' pay.

Royal Air Force

Training establishment and location	*Numbers trained in financial year 1996–97*[1]	*Cost £ million financial year 1996–97*[2]
RAF Halton (Airmen/women initial training)	2,537	9
RAF Honington (RAF regiment gunner)[3]	225	2
RAFC Cranwell (Initial officer training)[4]	[5]470	15

Royal Air Force

Training establishment and location	*Numbers trained in financial year 1996–97*[1]	*Cost £ million financial year 1996–97*[2]
RAFC Cranwell (Airmen aircrew training)[6]	93	2

[1] The numbers of personnel quoted include recoursees.

[2] Excludes trainees' salaries.

[3] RAF regiment gunners undertake some initial specialist training during initial recruitment training.

[4] Includes recruited internally and externally.

[5] The numbers given include 15 non-RAF personnel trained on a spare capacity basis.

[6] Personnel, recruited internally and externally, to be NCO aircrew.

Defence Sales Review

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the defence sales policy review covers all countries. [10365]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

Yes. The new criteria, announced by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 28 July, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*, will apply to licence applications for conventional arms to all destinations.

War Pensions

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for the medical and scientific review of qualifications for war pensions in respect of noise-induced hearing loss *(a)* the expected completion date and *(b)* the cost of conducting the review. [8247]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

The review will be chaired by the Government's Chief Medical Officer, Sir Kenneth Calman, and four independent experts on hearing loss. Due to availability, it will not be possible for the group to meet before September.

The findings of the review will be published in due course and it is estimated that the cost of the review will be around £2,000.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Old Coalfield Areas

9. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a further statement about his proposals following his visits to the old coalfield areas. [9356]

Mr. Prescott: The nation owes a debt to the coalfield areas. We are looking urgently at what is being done in these areas and what more we can do. As a start, I intend to look at the problems and opportunities in and around my hon. Friend's constituency—to see which measures work and which are less successful. I want then to broaden the discussion to bring in other coalfield communities, with a view to a national conference next spring.

Minimum Wage

10. **Mr. Prior:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if Her Majesty's Government will take into account the likely cost to local authorities when setting a level for the minimum wage. [9357]

Ms Armstrong: The independent Low Pay Commission will be asked to take into account all economic circumstances, including the likely impact on employers, before reaching a recommendation on the level at which the national minimum wage might be set.

Local Government Finance

11. **Mr. Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he proposes to reduce the gap between those benefiting most and least in respect of the standard spending assessment formula-funded mechanism to determine local authorities' revenue support grant levels. [9358]

Mr. Raynsford: This is a matter which will be discussed on 30 July when officials from my Department and local government representatives consider proposals from Barnsley metropolitan borough council and others. We shall carefully consider any views expressed on this issue.

8. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to review the financial allocations for the unitary authorities. [9355]

Mr. Raynsford: Under the local government reorganisation costs scheme, resources in the form of supplementary credit approvals are made available to reorganising authorities to cover transitional costs. Final bids under the scheme for 1996–97 are being evaluated and I expect to announce my decisions before the end of September.

We have invited bids for the mid-year review stage of the 1997–98 scheme, and expect to respond to these by the end of October.

15. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from local authorities about the abolition of the advance corporation tax credit and its impact on revenue support grant levels. [9362]

Ms Armstrong: My hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received representations from the Local Government Association which represents local authorities in England and Wales. I have received correspondence from Cambridgeshire county council.

21. **Mr. Letwin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the effect of recent interest rates rises on local authorities. [9368]

Mr. Raynsford: In overall terms, the impact on local authorities will be small and will be more than offset by increased interest receipts. Changes in interest rates will be taken into account in the formula for distributing grant under the local government finance settlement for 1998–99.

23. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what account has been taken of the effect on councils of the abolition of the advance corporation tax credit in his Department's spending plans. [9370]

Ms Armstrong: Steps are being taken to establish the impact on local authority pension funds following the next actuarial valuation of the fund in 1998. This information will be taken into account in determining the level of local authority provision for that and subsequent years.

24. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate his Department has made of the effect of recent interest rate rises on local authorities. [9371]

Mr. Raynsford: In overall terms, the impact on local authorities will be small and will be more than offset by increased interest receipts. Changes in interest rates will be taken into account in the formula for distributing grant under the local government finance settlement for 1998–99.

London Strategic Authority

13. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for which areas of current local government the strategic authority for London would have responsibility. [9360]

Mr. Raynsford: We have today published a Green Paper setting out our proposals for a Greater London authority, which lists the range of functions the Greater London authority will have and considers how they can be delivered effectively. Copies of the Green Paper are available in the House Libraries.

16. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the costs of establishing and running a strategic authority for London. [9363]

Mr. Raynsford: Our Green Paper, published today, sets out proposals and seeks views on a range of options for the nature and functions of the new strategic authority for London. It is not possible to make firm estimates of the cost of establishing and running the authority until we are clearer, following this consultation, on the final form that the new arrangements will take. Our overriding objective is that the new strategic authority should improve the efficiency with which pan-London activities are carried out. We intend that any additional spending on setting up the new authority will be offset by longer-term savings.

Planning Policy

14. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will amend the general development order to extend those categories of development which are subject to planning application and public inquiries. [9361]

Mr. Raynsford: The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 grants a general planning permission for a variety of mostly minor developments, subject to limits and conditions designed to protect amenity and the environment. We have no immediate plans to amend the order by bringing certain classes of permitted development within full planning control.

Asthma (Environmental Pollutants)

17. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps are being taken to reduce those environmental pollutants which have been demonstrated to contribute to the incidence of asthma. [9364]

Angela Eagle: No pollutants have been demonstrated to contribute to the incidence of asthma, but sulphur dioxide, ozone, particles and possibly nitrogen dioxide may cause a worsening of symptoms in asthmatics. The Government recognise the health effects of air pollution and are committed to rapid implementation of the national air quality strategy in order to improve air quality across the United Kingdom.

Water Charges

18. **Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with water companies on the subject of charging arrangements in substitution for the present system based on rateable values. [9365]

Mr. Meacher: The Deputy Prime Minister and I have met representatives of the water companies at the water summit and at other times. We shall consider their views alongside all others in the Government's review of the water charging system.

Regional Development Agencies

19. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions under what arrangements the boards of directors of the regional development agencies will be appointed. [9366]

Mr. Caborn: In the short term, we expect the boards of the regional development agencies to be appointed by the Secretary of State for he will wish to be guided by the needs and wishes of the regions.

Sustainable Development

20. **Mrs. Brinton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to extend the range of organisations placed under the requirement to take Agenda 21 on sustainable development as an instrumental part of their responsibilities. [9367]

Mr. Meacher: There is no mandatory requirement on any organisation to take on Agenda 21. However, a wide range of organisations, including central and local government, business and the voluntary sector, are committed to take forward the Agenda 21 agreement on sustainable development.

The Government accept their leadership role and are determined to implement sustainable development through their policies. We are introducing a new series of measures which will deliver this effectively throughout central Government Departments.

In relation to local government, last month, at the UN special session on the environment in New York, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister acknowledged the pivotal role of local authorities in promoting Local Agenda 21 and called on all UK local authorities to adopt Local Agenda 21 strategies by 2000. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister followed this up at last week's Local Government Association conference by announcing that a joint central-local government document will be produced giving practical guidance on how to put such strategies in place.

Businesses are subject to a range of environmental regulations which themselves are part of the UK Government's whole sustainable development package. We are working with them in other ways to promote sustainable development in the business sector. Extensive support to help companies improve their environmental performance is freely available through the Government's energy efficiency and environmental technology best practice programmes and network of regional contacts. The uptake of formal environmental management systems—that is International Standard Organisation 14001 and eco-management and audit scheme—has also been extensively promoted and leading companies are responding positively. We should like all UK businesses with over 250 employees to have a publicly declared environmental policy and report to their stakeholders on progress.

Global Temperature Changes

22. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of global temperature changes. [9369]

Mr. Meacher: Information on global temperature changes is assessed and published regularly on behalf of the Government by the UK Meteorological Office in conjunction with the climatic research unit at the university of East Anglia. The latest data available for 1997 show that the global surface temperature for the first half of the year was approximately 0.33 deg C above the 1961–90 average. Global temperatures are, on average about 0.5 deg C warmer now that they were at the end of the last century.

Preservation of the Countryside

25. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received concerning the preservation of the countryside. [9372]

Angela Eagle: We have received a large number of representations about a range of issues affecting the countryside. The countryside is one of our great national assets and we are carefully reviewing rural policy to ensure its improved protection and stewardship.

Community Initiative Power

26. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will bring forward proposals for a power of community initiative in local government. [9373]

Ms Armstrong: We intend to consult the Local Government Association and all other interested parties on the proposed new duty for councils to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area as we implement our manifesto programme for good local government.

Railtrack

34. **Mr. Keith Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the regulation of Railtrack. [9382]

Mr. Prescott: The Government are reviewing the regulation of railways generally and of Railtrack in particular, with a view to establishing a more effective and accountable regime.

London Underground

35. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he proposes to increase the use of the private finance initiative on the London Underground. [9383]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We support use of private finance to improve the underground through projects like the proposed power PFI deal. We are determined to attract more private finance to tackle the investment backlog in the underground's key assets, such as track, signalling and civil engineering structures. That is why we are reviewing public-private partnership options for the underground as a matter of urgency.

49. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress of private investment in London Underground. [9399]

Ms Jackson: London Underground is negotiating two PFI contracts—power and prestige—and awaiting bids for a third—connect. London Underground is also developing proposals for a number of other PFI projects. The Government are also considering public-private partnership options for London Underground as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much funding at current prices the Government provided to London Underground in each year since 1979. [11297]

Ms Jackson: Government funding is provided to London Transport, rather than its constituent businesses. The distribution of grant by LT between London Underground Ltd. and its other businesses is a matter for LT, subject to the ring fencing of support for Jubilee line extension. Total annual grant in constant 1997–98 prices provided to London Transport since 1979 is shown in the table.

Grant to London Transport since 1979 (1997–98 prices)

Year	*Total grant £ million*
1979	396
1980	493
1981	447
1982	602
1983	629
1984–85	592
1985–96	536
1986–87	475
1987–88	310
1988–89	242
1989–90	332
1990–91	600
1991–92	669
1992–93	988
1993–94	754
1994–95	840
1995–96	943
1996–97	963
1997–98[1]	759

[1] Estimated outturn.

The table excludes Docklands light railway grant, but from 1996–97 onwards it includes Croydon tramlink grant.

Channel Tunnel (Leeds Service)

37. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his estimated time scale for the introduction of a direct channel tunnel service from Leeds. [9386]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I understand that Eurostar (UK) Ltd. has no plans to introduce a direct international service from Leeds. However, a service between Glasgow and Paris should start later this year, and passengers from Leeds will be able to join that service at Doncaster.

Passenger Comfort Standards

38. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will require public transport operators to improve standards of passenger comfort; and if he will make a statement. [9387]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The fundamental review of transport policy will consider measures to raise the quality of public transport. As my right hon. Friend said in answering an earlier question, encouraging greater use of public transport is a key objective and passenger comfort is an aspect of this.

Liquid Petroleum Gas

39. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his policy towards the use of liquid petroleum gas in cars. [9389]

Dr. Strang: The Government recognise the potential of road fuel gases for significantly lowering emissions, as was demonstrated by the Chancellor's recent announcement of a freeze on duty on road gas fuels and his undertaking at least to maintain the current duty differential versus diesel for the lifetime of the current Parliament.

National Air Traffic Control Service

40. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures his Department is taking to implement the Government's plans for the future of the national air traffic control service. [9390]

Dr. Strang: We are reviewing the options for the future of the National Air Traffic Services. We shall make an announcement of our intentions in due course.

Traffic-free City Centres

41. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the viability of traffic-free city centres. [9391]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government believe that properly designed vehicle restricted areas can improve the local environment while sustaining or enhancing economic vitality. Decisions on whether to exclude traffic from town centres are a matter for the judgment of the local authority.

Freight Transport

42. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans his Department has to encourage the transportation of goods by rail as opposed to road. [9392]

48. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he intends to increase the proportion of freight carried by rail. [9398]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government want to see a greater proportion of freight go by rail rather than by road. Our White Paper on integrated transport policy, to be published next spring, will consider ways of achieving this objective.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list in percentage terms the movement of freight within the United Kingdom by *(a)* road, *(b)* rail and *(c)* water for each year from 1970 to 1996. [11117]

Ms Jackson: The information requested is given in the following table; full 1996 data are not yet available.

Freight traffic by mode: Great Britain[1]

Per cent. of billion tonne kilometres

Year	*Road*[2]	*Rail*	*Water*
1970	63	18	17
1971	64	16	16

Freight traffic by mode: Great Britain[1]

Per cent. of billion tonne kilometres

Year	*Road*[2]	*Rail*	*Water*
1972[3]	65	15	21
1973	63	16	22
1974	63	15	22
1975	66	15	20
1976	65	14	20
1977	58	12	24
1978	56	11	27
1979	55	11	30
1980	53	10	31
1981	54	10	31
1982	53	9	33
1983	52	9	33
1984	55	7	33
1985	55	8	31
1986	56	9	29
1987	58	9	28
1988	59	8	27
1989	62	8	26
1990	62	7	26
1991	61	7	27
1992	61	7	26
1993	64	7	24
1994	65	6	24
1995	66	6	23

[1] The percentages in the table do not add to 100 because of freight movements by other modes, notably pipeline.

[2] All goods vehicles, including those under 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight.

[3] Figures from 1972 onwards are not comparable with earlier years. From 1972, water includes all UK coastwise and one-port freight movements by sea and inland waterway traffic. Earlier years include only GB coastwise traffic and internal traffic on British Waterways Board waterways.

Car Dependency

43. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to encourage local authorities to take measures to reduce car dependency. [9393]

Dr. Strang: Government planning and transport guidance sets local authorities the objective of developing policies that encourage less reliance on the private car.

A3 (Hindhead)

44. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received about the necessity of improving the A3 at Hindhead. [9394]

Dr. Strang: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received representations both supporting and opposing an improvement of the A3 at Hindhead since preparatory work on that scheme stopped in November 1995. The scheme is included in the trunk road programme which is the subject of a fundamental review approved on 19 June.

Mrs. Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if she will make a statement on measures taken to relieve traffic congestion on the A3 at Hindhead. [10294]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Preparation work on proposals to improve the A3 at Hindhead was stopped in November 1995. The scheme will be included in the trunk roads review announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport on 19 June. The aim is to announce a decision next year on the outcome of the review.

Small Boat Safety

45. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that small boat safety is improved. [9395]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Coastguard agency actively promotes the safe use of recreational craft through national campaigns and local publicity. A national education campaign, sea smart, which was launched on 21 July, is aimed at primary and secondary school children in a co-ordinated campaign along the south coast. A series of local coastguard initiatives will concentrate on the sea and shoreline safety problems in particular areas. The agency has invited comments from organisations in this field on a consultative document about measures to improve the safety of non-regulated pleasure vessels without legislation. The sea safety liaison group, set up by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and including the Coastguard and the Marine Safety Agency, also promotes this work. The group has produced a range of leaflets targeted at small boat safety and further literature and advertising campaigns are planned.

West Coast Rail Services

46. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he next expects to meet officials of Railtrack to discuss improvements to west coast services. [9396]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I met Richard Branson of the Virgin Rail Group on 10 July and will be meeting the chief executive of Railtrack on 12 August. The Virgin Rail Group has committed to service improvements on the west coast main line through its franchise agreement with the franchising director, including improved reliability and increased capacity on the line from 2002. These depend to a great extent on the upgrading of the line on which the franchising director concluded an agreement with Railtrack in 1996. I understand that the Virgin Rail Group is currently discussing further upgrading options with Railtrack.

Fenchurch Street Line

47. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent representations he has received on the standard of service on the Fenchurch Street line. [9397]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Neither my Department nor the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising have received any representations about London, Tilbury, Southend Rail, the operators of the Fenchurch Street line, since this Government took office.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Paterson: To ask the secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the Budget measures on carbon dioxide emissions. [9359]

Mr. Meacher: The combined effect of increasing the road fuel duty escalator from 5 to 6 per cent. reducing VAT on domestic fuels to 5 per cent. and the reduction in the gas levy will be to reduce annual carbon dioxide emissions by about 0.2 million tonnes of carbon in 2000 and by 2.3 million tonnes in 2010.

Central European Time

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect on traffic accidents and casualties of the adoption of central European time. [9385]

Dr. Strang: The Transport Research Laboratory has estimated that there could be net savings in road casualties in Great Britain were central European time to be adopted. Further work is in progress to refine these estimates and I expect to receive a report shortly.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much at current prices has been awarded from the single regeneration budget; what was the total level of investment at current prices supported by the single regeneration budget; and how many jobs the single regeneration budget has created or safeguarded, in each United Kingdom region, in each year since the single regeneration budget was established. [11305]

Angela Eagle: The single regeneration budget was formed in 1994 by bringing together 20 regeneration programmes in England. Details of the expenditure and the outputs achieved under each programme are set out in the departmental reports issued each year—Department of the Environment annual report 1997, Cmd 3607. Since 1995–96, new regeneration schemes have been funded through the SRB challenge fund. The table gives the regional breakdown of expenditure and jobs created for 1995–96, the first year of the challenge fund, and provisional figures for 1996–97, its second year.

1995–96 actual

Region	*SRB challenge fund 1997–98 prices £000*	*Total scheme expenditure 1997–98 prices £000*	*Jobs created/ preserved Number*
Eastern	2,614	16,455	498
East Midlands	8,259	57,341	2,863
London	37,847	105,517	7,165
Merseyside	11,501	76,661	1,978
North East	18,296	56,377	2,729
North West	18,087	116,993	8,627
South East	5,541	16,937	1,624
South West	4,077	17,380	1,425
West Midlands	16,937	86,183	5,318
Yorkshire and Humberside	19,446	123,946	7,009
England	142,605	673,790	39,236

1996–97 Provisional

Region	*SRB challenge fund 1997–98 prices £000*	*Total scheme expenditure 1997–98 prices £000*	*Jobs created/ preserved Number*
Eastern	5,712	27,744	600
East Midlands	16,524	93,942	6,500
London	69,972	242,760	16,800
Merseyside	21,828	105,060	1,400
North East	30,294	117,402	5,600
North West	38,046	265,812	13,800
South East	12,138	86,088	2,000
South West	7,956	35,802	1,900
West Midlands	39,168	206,040	16,200
Yorkshire and Humberside	41,412	189,924	13,000
England	283,050	1,370,574	77,800

River Water Quality

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of river water was of good or fair quality in each year since 1987. [11159]

Angela Eagle: There has been a net upgrading in chemical quality of 25.8 per cent. of the total monitored length of rivers and canals in England and Wales between 1990 and 1996. The proportion of rivers and canals classified as good or fair quality under the Environment Agency's general quality assessment for the years in which surveys were carried out since 1987 is as follows:

	Good	*Fair*
1990	47.0	37.5
1992	52.6	34.4
1995	59.5	31.5
1996	58.6	31.5

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimates he has made of the savings at current prices achieved in each year since the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering for local government services as a result of such tendering. [11303]

Mr. Raynsford: Research commissioned by the Department has looked at both the financial and service quality impact of CCT on blue-collar services covered by the Local Government Act 1988. This has shown average annual savings on contract prices of blue-collar services of 6 per cent. for the first round of tendering under the Act, and 9 per cent. for the second round. It also shows that the savings have been accompanied by only minor improvements in service standards, and that more attention needs to be given to the development of local performance indicators.

Other research, commissioned outside the Department, suggests a wide variation on estimates of savings depending upon the way in which social costs and benefits are treated.

Methyl Bromide

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the critical uses of methyl bromide which his Department has evaluated. [11106]

Angela Eagle: The phaseout date for methyl bromide, and the criteria for the critical use exemption after phaseout, will be considered at the ninth meeting of the parties to the Montreal protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer, in September. Any evaluation of the critical uses of methyl bromide will depend on the criteria that are set, and the availability of suitable alternatives after phaseout.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list, by company, the alternatives to methyl bromide which his Department has evaluated. [11107]

Angela Eagle: In 1996, the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food commissioned ADAS to review the use of methyl bromide in horticulture, and to consider what alternatives are available. Its report identifies a range of alternatives which are either being developed, or already being used in the UK, but does not identify the individual companies involved. In April 1997, the United Nations environment programme's technical and economic assessment panel and methyl bromide technical options committee produced a report on alternatives to methyl bromide worldwide. Copies of this report, and the ADAS report, will be placed in the Library shortly.

Capital Challenge

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much funding at current prices has been attracted from the private and voluntary sectors under the pilot capital challenge funding scheme for local authorities in each year since it was introduced. [11160]

Angela Eagle: Support for local authorities' capital expenditure is available through the capital challenge pilot scheme in three financial years: 1997–98; 1998–99; and 1999–00. Estimates for support for successful projects from the private and voluntary sectors are available only for the three-year period as a whole, and are as follows:

Voluntary Sector: £20 million

Other Private Sector: £678 million.

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what performance targets he has set the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre executive agency for 1997–98. [11698]

Mr. Raynsford: The agency's principal targets for 1997–98 are to achieve total revenue of £7.12 million and to achieve a minimum contribution to the Exchequer of £555,000.

The agency's other main targets are:

To achieve at least six out of the following seven targets:

(a) to increase the proportion fo events with more than 200 delegates to 30 per cent.

(b) to increase the proportion of target room hire revenue achieved six months in advance to 55 per cent.

(c) an overall score for quality of service in client questionnaires of at least 77 per cent.

(d) 98 per cent. of clients completing the client questionnaire to report that they would use the centre again;

(e) the number of complaints to be received to be less than four per hundred events;

(f) an average response time in dealing with complaints of less than eight working days;

(g) an overall score for quality of service provided by the catering staff of at least 80 per cent.

Road Projects

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the network enhancement schemes and control projects to be undertaken during the financial year 1997–98 indicating the likely cost, start and completion dates. [10131]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 29 July 1997:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, has asked me to reply to your request to list the trunk road enhancement schemes and network control projects to be undertaken during the financial year 1997–98, and to give an indication of the likely cost, start and completion dates.

I have enclosed with this letter a copy of the Highways Agency's 1997–98 Business Plan which lists at Annex E the network enhancement projects (NEPS) and network control projects which the Highways Agency intends to undertake this financial year. I have attached a list showing the costs and seasonal start and finish dates for these schemes, as you requested.

Network enhancement projects cover various improvements including local safety schemes, traffic calming measures and environmental schemes and start and finish dates can be affected by external matters, some of which are outside the Highways Agency's control, such as statutory procedures or urgent statutory undertakers works or the weather. In the circumstances, it is difficult to be precise with the actual timing.

The Agency is also undertaking a number of smaller projects, and may add or substitute alternative schemes to the list published in the Business Plan as priorities change and where circumstances do not permit all the named schemes to proceed as planned.

Network enhancement projects 1997–98

Scheme	*Estimated cost (£ million)*	*Start*	*Completion*
North			
M5 Jct 16 (A38) Imp	0.150	January 1998	March 1998
M11 Jct 4 Sign Gantries	0.065	December 1997	February 1998
M25 Jct 24–25 Nearside Safety Fencing	0.071	August 1997	September 1997
M25 Jct 24–25 Nearside Safety Fencing	0.071	August 1997	September 1997
M25/M23 Southbound Merge	0.095	Autumn 1997	Spring 1998
M27 Moorlands/Moorgreen Drainage	0.053	Autumn 1997	Spring 1998

Network enhancement projects 1997–98

Scheme	*Estimated cost (£ million)*	*Start*	*Completion*
A1 Elkesley Lighting (Nottinghamshire)	0.100	January 1998	March 1998
North of Morpeth Route Action Plan	0.100	September 1997	November 1997
A1 Angel junction	0.300	March 1998	Summer 1998
A2(W) Little Chef, Cobham	0.099	March 1998	April 1998
A3 Wisley Cyclist Facilities	0.070	Autumn 1997	Spring 1998
A4 Thornbury Road	0.119	November 1997	February 1998
A5 Lilbourne Crossroads Lighting (Warkwickshire/Northamptonshire)	0.070	Winter/Spring 1998	Winter/Spring 1998
A52 Accident Reduction Trials	0.190	October 1997	Spring 1999
A12 Hatfield Peverel CRSF	0.278	October 1997	December 1997
A13/A406 Junction Resignalling (LB Newham)	0.106	September 1997	December 1997
A14 Levington Link Road	0.700	September 1997	December 1997
A19 Selby Town Centre Traffic Calming (LSS)	0.076	January 1998	March 1998
A20 Lydden Spout Layby	0.080	January 1997	March 1997
A27/B2144 Junction MOVA	0.027	Autumn 1997	Spring 1998
A27 Ranscome Lane	0.080	October 1997	December 1997
A27 Chichester, Bognor Bridge	0.470	December 1997	May 1998
A30 Cannonstown Phase 2	0.010	September 1997	October 1997
A30 Woodleigh Junction Phase 2	0.092	October 1997	December 1997
A31 St. Leonards Footbridge	0.676	January 1998	July 1998
A34 Cannock–Stoke on Trent Speed Cameras (Staffordshire)	0.065	Autumn 1997	Winter/Spring 1998
A34 Great Wryley Traffic Calming (Staffordshire)	0.099	Autumn 1997	Winter/Spring 1998
A36 West Wellow Calming Phase 2	0.082	Autumn 1997	Spring 1998
A41 Berryfield Right Turn (Aylesbury)	0.160	December 1997	March 1998
A41 Chester Road, Hootton	0.175	January 1998	March 1998
A43 Evenly Crossroads (Northants)	0.350	October 1997	March 1998
A45 Ryton to Tollbar End CRSF	0.170	November 1997	march 1998
A47 Toll Bar Junction at A1 (Cambridgeshire)	0.158	September 1997	November 1997
A49/A5 Bayleys Roundabout, Shrewsbury–Pelican Crossing (Salop)	0.080	October 1997	Winter/Spring 1998
A57/A618 Mansfield Road, Rotherham	0.350	February 1998	June 1998
A66 Penruddock, Kemplay, Threlkeld–County B'ry	0.150	October 1997	November 1997
A140 Route Treatment Phases I and II (Suffolk/Norfolk)	0.409	November 1997	March 1998
A259 Redoubt Way	0.275	October 1997	January 1998
A303 Burton Jct Imp (Wiltshire)	0.101	November 1997	December 1997
A312 Cranford High Street Improvement	0.179	January 1998	March 1998
A316 Whitton Roundabout Signalization	0.149	October 1997	December 1997
A449 Gorse Corner–Right Turn Lane (Staffordshire)	0.090	Winter 1997	Winter/Spring 1998
A585 Skipool Roundabout	0.198	October 1997	December 1997
A638/B6428 Offley Lane Roundabout, Wakefield	0.432	October 1997	December 1997
A663 Middleton Road	0.666	November 1997	March 1998
A5036 Switch Island Phase 1	1.227	September 1997	September 1998
A6120 Weetwood Lane Improvement	0.210	November 1997	March 1998
Red Light and Speed Cameras (1997–98 Programme)	0.393	April 1997	March 1998
Red Light and Speed Cameras (Balance of 1996–97 Programme)	0.055	April 1996	March 1998
Closed Circuit TV (Balance of 1996–97 Programme)	0.051	April 1996	March 1998
Closed Circuit TV Enforcement (1997–98 Programme)	0.110	April 1997	march 1998
Software Enhancements (Balance of 1996–97 Programme)	0.005	April 1996	March 1998
Urban Traffic Control systems (1997–98 Programme)	0.270	April 1997	March 1998
Variable Message Signs (Balance of 1996–97 Programme)	0.025	April 1996	March 1998

Network control projects

Scheme	*Estimated cost (£ million)*	*Start*	*Completion*
M6 Staffs Comms. Upg.	0.080	November 1997	December 1997
Introduction of motorway control system at Leicester Police Control Office	0.070	November 1996	October 1997
Midlands Driver information System Phase 1	0.213	With QS	
Midlands Security System	1.000	Autumn 1997	
Midlands DIS (e)	0.150	September 1997	January 1998
MIDAS Phase 2	2.820	December 1997	Summer 1999
Stafford Control Office	0.110	November 1997	December 1997
Chigwell Police Control Office. Dynamic Display Equipment	0.487	Winter 1997	Summer 1998
M4 Heston COBS Upgrade Associated Works	0.090	September 1997	Phase 1– November 1997
M4/M5/M32/A48/A49 Avon and Somerset CCTV Upgrade	2,340	October 1996	September 1997
M4/M5/M32 NMCS2 Infrastructure and COBs	7,000	March 1995	September 1997

Shadow Tolling

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, column *494*, concerning shadow toll payment mechanisms, what factors are being considered in the development work on payment mechanisms. [10680]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The development work is exploring the feasibility of a refined payment mechanism, the reward structure, appropriate allocation of risk, and the implications for the value for money which might be on offer under a refined mechanism.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, column *494*, whether, if the development work on payment mechanisms is successful, such mechanisms can be applied to roads which have already been approved by him. [10679]

Ms Jackson: No. The terms of signed contracts cannot be modified in this way.

Environmentally Conscious Driving

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the potential environmental benefits of advising motorists to turn their engines off when stationary; what estimate he has made of the relative benefits in respect of cars whose engines are *(a)* warm and *(b)* cold; what assessment he had made of the success of such advice in other European countries with particular reference to Germany; and if he will make a statement. [10562]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Advice is regularly given to drivers in official publications, particularly with regard to environmentally conscious driving. In general, benefits can be gained in terms of reduced emissions and savings in fuel by switching a vehicle's engine off if the vehicle is likely to be stationary in traffic for more than two minutes. The Department has drawn up research proposals to assess the benefits of instructing drivers to switch engines off while waiting at, for example, traffic lights. Under some circumstances, such as when an engine is still cold following a very short journey, it is possible that re-starting could result in higher emissions than would occur had the engine remained idling. The research will therefore identify the engine parameters under which emissions reductions will be achieved. No assessment has been made of the success of advice in Germany or other European countries.

M25 Widening

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what *(a)* contracts have been let and *(b)* other liabilities entered into in respect of works, plans or surveys relating to or implementing the proposal to widen the M25 to 10 to 12 lanes between junctions 12 and 15; and if he will make a statement. [10644]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, dated 29 July 1997:

The Minister for Transport in London asked me to reply to your recent question about contracts let, and liabilities entered into, for the M25 Junctions 12 to 15 widening.

The only contract existing for the M25 Junctions 12 to 15 Widening Scheme is the preliminary design commission with consultants Howard Humphreys and Partners.

Rail Freight

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the total tonnage of rail freight and the total net tonne miles carried by rail in Great Britain for the year up to 31 March 1997 and for each of the previous three years. [11330]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is as follows:

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Goods lifted—million tonnes	103	97	101	101
Goods moved—billion tonne kilometres	13.8	13.0	13.1	[1]—

[1] This figure is not yet available.

Aston Clinton Bypass

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received about the proposed Aston Clinton bypass; and if 2002 remains the intended construction date. [10469]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* We have received a small number of representations about the A41 Aston Clinton bypass. This scheme will be considered in the strategic review of the roads programme. Pending the conclusions of the review, which we hope to announce next spring, it would be premature to indicate when the scheme might be constructed.

Road Traffic Regulations

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to announce the conclusion of his consultations regarding road traffic regulation law as it affects rights of way across school premises. [10630]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* I hope to make a statement on what was a very wide-ranging review of road traffic regulation law later this year.

Seat Belts

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and if he will extend the compulsory fitting of seat belts to vehicles *(a)* on normal scheduled services and *(b)* used mainly for providing transport for the general public which carry schoolchildren. [11321]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have no plans to extend the compulsory fitting of seat belts to vehicles used for these purposes. There are significant technical difficulties in fitting seat belts in buses, which are normally the type of vehicle used to provide these services. In addition, the length and nature of passenger journeys on scheduled services is such that the likelihood of seat belts being used is far less than on faster long-distance journeys. However, it should be remembered that the existing requirements for seat belts to be provided for children on organised trips in minibuses and coaches will ensure that they are available in thousands of vehicles that otherwise would not have had them fitted.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what body is responsible for ensuring the seat belts in vehicles carrying schoolchildren have been correctly fitted. [11175]

Ms Jackson: Responsibility for ensuring that a seat belt assembly has been correctly fitted must ultimately rest with the seat belt installer. It is proposed that the Vehicle Inspectorate will include the condition of all minibus and coach seat belts in the random roadside inspections that it carries out. It is also proposed to include checks on minibus and coach seat belts in the annual MOT test. We hope to consult on details shortly.

Air Transport (Nuclear Material)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the recommendations by the International Atomic Energy Agency that individual states stop the air transport of plutonium materials in type B packages pending the development of packages conforming to new standards; and if he will make a statement. [11230]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department is unaware of the IAEA making such a recommendation.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what studies his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the hazards of mixed oxide fuel in severe air transport accidents; and if he will provide details of such studies. [11231]

Ms Jackson: The Department contributed to the study, made by the Advisory Committee on the Safe Transport of Radioactive Materials—ACTRAM, an independent body charged with advising the then Secretary of State for Transport and the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission—and reported in "The Transport of Civil Plutonium by Air", ISBN 0 11 550871 6, 1988. ACTRAM concluded that

> "the health risk to people from the current transport of civil plutonium by air to and from the UK is [also] extremely remote and acceptable"

and that

> "plutonium dioxide mixed with uranium dioxide in the form of ceramic pellets constitutes no significant inhalation hazard".

A copy of ACTRAM's report is held in the Library.

Rail Travel

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to encourage air passengers on domestic and short-haul flights to convert to rail travel. [11152]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The fundamental review of transport policy now under way will be considering how all modes of transport can contribute to a more environmentally sustainable integrated transport system. This will include consideration of ways of ensuring that there is a proper balance between modes.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the environmental impact of substituting 10 per cent. of domestic and shorthaul flights with rail travel over the next 10 years. [11154]

Ms Jackson: We have no readily available information on this question, which would require detailed study. Environmental aspects of changes in travel patterns will be an important part of the fundamental review of transport policy.

Runway Slot Allocation

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will undertake a review of the system of allocating runway slots. [11185]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Slot allocation at European Community airports is governed by EC regulation 95/93. We are currently awaiting proposals from the Commission for revision of the regulation, which will then be the subject of discussion in Transport Council.

National Airlines (Subsidies)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on the competitive position of United Kingdom airlines of the provision by European Union Governments of state subsidies to their national airlines. [11178]

Ms Glenda Jackson: State subsidies to national airlines are approved by the European Commission on a case-by-case basis. The impact of such aid on the competitive position of United Kingdom airlines is assessed by the United Kingdom Government following publication of the individual Commission decision in the *Official Journal of the European Communities.*

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to encourage other European Union countries to end state subsidies to their national airlines. [11179]

Ms Jackson: Approval of state subsidy to national airlines is a matter for the European Commission. The United Kingdom has consistently opposed such aid since it threatens to distort competition and penalise efficient operators. The Commission has stated that its recent approval of aid to Alitalia is likely to be the last for a state-owned airline.

Regional Airports

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his policy in respect of deregulation of landing charges at regional airports. [11181]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Landing charges at all larger airports in Great Britain are subject to regulation by the Civil Aviation Authority under the Airports Act 1986. The Department of Trade and Industry is now reviewing the system of regulation of utilities, and this may produce conclusions of relevance to future policy on regulation of airports.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to increase the proportion of international flights to and from English regional, Scottish and Welsh airports in comparison with London airports. [11176]

Ms Jackson: Where flights operate it is normally determined by the commercial decisions of airlines. The majority of the UK's bilateral air services agreements permit carriers to serve all points in the United Kingdom. Where there are restrictions, we seek to remove them so that all airports can compete fairly for traffic.

Heavy Vehicles

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy not to increase the maximum axle weight of lorries beyond 40 tonnes. [11120]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The existing maximum axle weight for lorries is 10.5 tonnes which, in certain cases, will increase to 11.5 tonnes from 1 January 1999. The existing general gross weight limit for articulated vehicles with five or more axles is 38 tonnes and 44 tonnes for certain six-axle vehicles in combined road/rail movements. From 1 January 1999, we will allow an increase in the weight limit from 38 to 40 tonnes for articulated vehicles with five or more axles on international journeys. With regard to allowing 44 tonne lorries generally, I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) on 25 July, *Official Report*, columns *788–89*.

London Transport (Complaints)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last reviewed with *(a)* London Regional Transport, *(b)* London Buses and *(c)* London Underground their compliance with the recommendations of the Wilcox committee report on the handling of complaints. [10995]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend has not undertaken such a review. London Transport handles complaints using established procedures which are broadly consistent with the recommendations of the citizen's charter task force.

Rail Fare Increases

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what was the average increase in real terms in rail fares between 1979 and 1997; [11256]

(2) what were the annual increases in real terms in rail fares in each year since 1979. [11257]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Information for each year between 1979 and 1996 inclusive is in the table. Figures for 1997 are not available.

Key commuter and leisure fares are regulated by the franchising director. For three years from 1 January 1996 annual increases in regulated fares are capped in line with the retail prices index from the June 1995 price base. For four years from 1 January 1999, increases are capped at RPI minus 1 per cent. There is some limited scope for individual commuter fares—in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Greater Manchester—to exceed the cap where these are balanced by other regulated fares being held below the cap.

Rail fare index

	Rail fare index 1979=100 (a)	*RPI 1979=100 (b)*	*Real rail fare index 1979=100 (c)*	*Annual increase in real rail fares*
1979	100.0	100.0	100.0	
1980	124.2	118.0	105.3	5.3 per cent.
1981	142.1	132.0	107.8	2.2 per cent.
1982	163.1	143.4	113.8	5.7 per cent.
1983	171.8	149.9	114.6	0.7 per cent.
1984	173.6	157.4	110.3	–3.8 per cent.
1985	184.6	167.0	110.6	0.3 per cent.
1986	197.1	172.7	114.2	3.3 per cent.
1987	207.3	179.9	115.2	0.9 per cent.
1988	221.7	188.7	117.5	2.0 per cent.
1989	241.9	203.3	119.0	1.2 per cent.
1990	263.1	226.1	118.4	–2.2 per cent.
1991	290.5	235.6	123.3	5.8 per cent.
1992	311.7	244.5	127.5	3.4 per cent.
1993	333.6	248.3	134.3	5.3 per cent.
1994	348.4	254.4	137.0	2.0 per cent.
1995	363.9	263.2	138.3	0.9 per cent.
1996	377.6	269.5	140.0	1.3 per cent.

Percentage change from 1996 to 1979 40.0 per cent.

[1] (c) = 100* (a)/(b).

Source:

Office for National Statistics.

Airport Infrastructure Investment

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much at current prices was invested in airport infrastructure in the United Kingdom in each year since 1979. [11261]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The available figures for investment in airport infrastructure and air traffic control for Great Britain are given. Information was not compiled on a consistent basis before 1983–84.

	£ million
1983–84	198
1984–85	223
1985–86	216
1986–87	219
1987–88	250
1988–89	291
1989–90	379
1990–91	578
1991–92	461
1992–93	432
1993–94	504
1994–95	639
1995–96	576
1996–97	624

American Airlines (Heathrow)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the number of passengers flying with American Airlines through Heathrow airport in 1996; and what is the projected number of passengers in 2005. [10851]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The number of passengers who flew with American Airlines through Heathrow airport in 1996 was 1.4 million. American Airlines predicts that this will increase to 2.3 million in 2005 assuming 6 per cent. growth, an open skies agreement and the capacity to use larger aircraft.

Airports (Access)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to introduce bus priority lanes to Heathrow and Gatwick airports. [10855]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 29 July 1997:

The Minister for Transport in London has asked me to reply to your recent question asking what proposals there are to introduce bus priority lanes to Heathrow & Gatwick Airports.

The Highways Agency, in partnership with Heathrow Airport Limited, are currently implementing a scheme to provide a dedicated bus and coach lane on the M4 Spur Road to Heathrow Airport. It will reduce journey times for the large number of buses and coaches that use the Spur as well as further encouraging the use of public transport for journeys to and from the airport. Work started on 27 June and is expect to take two months to complete.

There are no plans at the present time to introduce bus priority lanes on the approaches to Gatwick Airport.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take steps to allow only coaches and other multiple-occupancy vehicles in the outside lanes of motorways on approaches to major airports to reduce congestion. [10856]

Ms Jackson: For safety reasons, coaches and buses have been generally banned from the outside, or overtaking lane of motorways with three or more lanes since 1 January 1996 because newer buses and coaches are restricted to 65 mph by their speed limiters. We will be reviewing this ban in 1998, once there has been a full two years operation.

Exceptionally, the Highways Agency is building an extra offside lane in addition to the existing three lanes on a 0.9 mile stretch of the M4 spur to Heathrow airport, which will be specifically restricted to buses and coaches. This lane is on the offside to accommodate traffic flows at the roundabout at either end of the spur road. The £1 million cost is being met by BAA plc. We have no immediate plans to introduce similar measures at other airports but will be watching the effects of this experiment with interest.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to improve public transport access to airports. [10854]

Ms Jackson: My Department will be studying options for increasing the contribution that public transport can make to access airports, as part of preparation for the integrated transport White Paper.

London Airports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to receive a report from the inspector at the terminal 5 inquiry. [10804]

Ms Glenda Jackson: It is not known at this stage precisely when the report will be submitted. The public inquiry into the proposed fifth terminal at Heathrow airport is not scheduled to finish until the second half of 1998, after which the inspector will prepare his report on the applications before the inquiry.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on how many occasions the use of reduced separation at Heathrow and Gatwick have been logged in the watch logs at West Drayton during *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997. [10805]

Ms Jackson: I refer to my answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *132*. The specific information is not available. The recording of the number of occasions when reduced separation is used is not an operational requirement and is not part of the trial procedure.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the number of passengers flying with British Airways and its franchisees through Heathrow airport in 1996; and what are the projected numbers in 2005. [10852]

Ms Jackson: The number of passengers who flew with British Airways and its franchisees through Heathrow airport in 1996 was 25.4 million. British Airways predicts that this will increase to 32.7 million in 2005.

Mrs. Dunwoody : To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the loss of flight capacity at Heathrow airport form the closure of the cross-wind runway. [11071]

Ms Jackson: The cross-wind runway remains open, and I have made no estimate of the potential capacity loss were it to close.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the annual passenger capacity for the proposed fifth terminal at Heathrow airport on the day of opening; and when he expects it to reach a capacity of 30 million passengers. [10853]

Ms Jackson: I have made no such estimates. These are matters for BAA plc as promoter of the scheme, and are being examined by the public inquiry currently under way.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for how many movements and what percentage of movements the cross-wind runway at Heathrow airport has been used in the last five years. [10850]

Ms Jackson: Data provided by National Air Traffic Services Ltd., show that in the five-year period from 1 January 1992 to 31 December 1996 the cross-wind runway at Heathrow was used as follows:

Year	*Movements*	*Percentage of total movements (all runways)*
1992	1,347	0.33
1993	255	0.06
1994	136	0.03
1995	256	0.06
1996	241	0.05

Railways Act 1993

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to make greater use of section 4 of the Railways Act 1993. [11114]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Section 4 of the Railways Act 1993 places a number of duties on the Secretary of State and the Rail Regulator. One of the key powers available to the Secretary of State under the Act, which is covered by these duties, is the power to issue objectives, instructions and guidance to the franchising director. The Government are currently reviewing the franchising director's objectives, instructions and guidance and will make an announcement in due course.

Transport Projects (Valuation Formula)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will amend the cost-benefit analysis formula used for determining the value of road projects to give greater weight to *(a)* air pollution, *(b)* destruction of the natural environment, *(c)* noise pollution and *(d)* the existence of public transport alternatives. [11108]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The COBA method does not assess the factors listed by the hon. Member. The effects of a road scheme on air and noise pollution and its impact on the natural environment are set out in the environmental impact assessment, which serves with COBA to determine the value of a road project. Public transport alternatives are considered at an early stage in the development of a scheme when assessing the options to remedy the problems identified.

The hon. Member will wish to note, however, that the Government, as part of their consultation document "What Role for Trunk Roads in England?", have invited comments on how the appraisal system might be broadened, including the weighting of environmental factors against economic and safety considerations.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to incorporate safety standards and environmental impact considerations into the formula for calculating the expected rate of return for rail projects; and if he will make a statement. [11109]

Ms Jackson: The Department is carrying out a fundamental review of transport policy with the aim of providing a balanced transport system which is efficient, environmentally sustainable and safe, which meets the needs of all sections of society and which provides genuine choice to meet people's future transport needs. The contribution of rail and other modes in achieving these objectives will be carefully examined, together with the implications for how projects should be assessed.

Bus Services (Subsidy)

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the level of public subsidy for bus services outside London in each year since 1984. [112898]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The following table shows the level of public transport revenue support for bus services in Great Britain outside London:

	At current prices (£ million)	*At 1995–96 prices (£ million)*
1984–85	364	596
1985–86	352	547
1986–87	305	461
1987–88	229	329
1988–89	221	297
1989–90	212	266
1990–91	210	249
1991–92	237	264
1992–93	232	249
1993–94	218	227
1994–95	217	222
1995–96	226	226

A11 (Accidents)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what have been the trends in road accident figures on the Norfolk section of the A11 over the last two years; and what representations he has received in respect of dualling further sections of the road. [9605]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Road accident figures for the last two years on the Norfolk section of the A11 are shown in the following table.

Reported injury accidents on the Norfolk section of the A11

	1995				*1996*			
	Fatal	*Serious*	*Slight*	*Total*	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Slight*	*Total*
Roundabouts	0	3	8	11	0	4	9	13
Dual carriageways	0	7	10	17	1	6	19	26
Single carriageways	4	20	51	75	1	10	34	45
Total	4	30	69	103	2	20	62	84

A number of representations from hon. Members about the dualling of the A11 have been received and there have also been representations supporting the dualling of the entire length of the A11. There has also been a campaign conducted by the local media known as "Complete the DuAlling".

London Transport (Investment)

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much, at current prices, was invested by London Transport in *(a)* network maintenance and improvements and *(b)* rolling stock in each year since 1979. [11258]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information is not readily available in the form requested.

Roads Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much the Government spent on roads in each year since 1979 at current prices. [11243]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Road expenditure information is published annually in the "Transport Report". Summary information for years prior to 1985–86 was published in the Government's expenditure plans.

The expenditure figures requested are as follows:

£ millions (1995–96 prices)

	1979–80	*1980–81*	*1981–82*	*1982–83*	*1983–84*	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*
National roads	1,146	1,136	1,237	1,351	1,243	1,336	1,289	1,326	1,394
Local roads	2,244	2,245	2,176	2,312	2,362	2,725	2,777	2,821	696
Total	3,390	3,381	3,413	3,662	3,605	4,060	4,067	4,147	2,091

£ millions (1995–96 prices)

	1988–89	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
National roads	1,360	1,719	2,120	2,070	2,108	2,140	2,087	1,760	1,573
Local roads[1]	801	662	668	798	898	984	1,001	897	713
Total	2,161	2,381	2,788	2,868	3,006	3,124	3,088	2,657	2,286

[1] For 1979–80 to 1986–87, the entries comprise local authority expenditure on roads. For 1987 onwards, because of a change in expenditure classification, the entries comprise central Government support for local authorities in terms of grant and credit approvals—which do not reflect the total sum of local authority expenditure on roads.

Railways (Funding)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the total level of *(a)* Government financial support and *(b)* public subsidies for the railways in each year since 1979 at current prices. [11242]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The table provides details of British Rail's external finance requirement for each year from 1980 to 1993–94.

Year	*£ million (1996–97 prices)*
1980–81	1,759
1981–82	1,949
1982–83	1,607
1983–84	1,469
1984–85	1,803
1985–86	1,488
1986–87	1,233
1987–88	821
1988–89	531
1989–90	939
1990–91	1,317
1991–92	1,682
1992–93	2,276
1993–94	1,569

The table provides details of the passenger grants paid by the franchising director to train operating companies in each of the three years since the industry was restructured on 1 April 1994.

£ million 1996–97 prices

Year	Grants paid to private sector TOCs	Grants paid to TOCs owned by British Rail	Total grants paid by Franchising director
1994–95	—	1,883	1,883
1995–96	20	1,696	1,716
1996–97	552	1,257	1,809

Source:

Figures for 1980–81 to 1986–85 are derived from figures published in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1986–87 to 1988–89". Figures for 1985–86 to 1993–94 are derived from figures published in British Rail's annual reports and accounts. Figures for 1994–95 to 1996–97 are derived from figures published in the "Transport Report 1997", with extra detail provided by the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising.

Railway Investment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how much was invested by British Rail in new rail rolling stock in each year since 1979 at current prices; [11241]

(2) how much the Government invested in the rail network in each year since 1979 in current prices. [11240]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The table shows public sector investment in railway rolling stock, together with total public sector investment in the rail network, for each year between 1979 and 1996–97.

£ million 1996–97 prices

	Public sector rolling stock investment	*Total public sector investment*
1980	279	977
1981	219	831
1982	190	713
1983	135	786
1984–85	140	1,028
1985–86	137	899
1986–87	128	841
1987–88	156	951
1988–89	294	982
1989–90	309	1,173
1990–91	359	1,113
1991–92	521	1,486
1992–93	592	1,628
1993–94	452	1,249
1994–95	342	1,183
1995–96	85	930
1996–97	—	16

Notes:

1. Investment directly funded by passenger transport executive is not included.

2. Figures for 1984–85 cover a 15-month period.

3. Figures for 1994–95 and 1995–96 include investment undertaken by Railtrack, EPS and Union Railways while they were publicly owned but not part of BR. BR rolling stock investment was £212 million in 1994–95 and £29 million in 1995–96, both in 1996–97 prices. Total investment numbers for 1994–95 and 1995–96 are not directly comparable with figures for previous years due to the adoption of a new accounting practice by Railtrack.

4. The figure for 1996–97 covers British Rail only, excluding any investment undertaken by Railtrack, EPS and Union Railways during the few weeks at the start of the year when they were publicly owned. No separate details of rolling stock investment are available.

Source:

Annual reports and accounts of British Rail, Railtrack, European Passenger Services and Union Railways.

Wyre Piddle Bypass

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on traffic flows in the village of Wyre Piddle, Worcestershire. [9384]

Dr. Strang: The latest figures supplied to the Department by Hereford and Worcester county council in July 1996 relate to flows in 1994. They show an annual average daily traffic flow on the main road in the village of between 10,500 and 11,500 with the percentage of heavy commercial vehicles standing at between 11 and 12 per cent.

London Bus Service Targets

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library a copy of his letter to London Transport Buses relating to the new quality of service targets. [10994]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have now placed a copy of my letter to the chairman of London Transport in the Library.

Wrexham Central Station

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library of the notices given by the train operator and Railtrack to the franchising director relating to the proposed closure of Wrexham Central station. [11128]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No. The Railways Act 1993 requires the franchising director to publish notices of his acceptance of closure proposals. That has been done in this case. The Railways Act does not require the franchising director to publish the notices given to him by operators or Railtrack. Nor are these items which the franchising director is required to place on his public register.

Transport Investment (London)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the total public investment, at current prices, in transport in London in each year since 1979. [11194]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Figures are not readily available in this form. "Transport Statistics for London 1996" reports total investment in road and rail in London and the south-east for the past 10 years. Transport investment is reported annually in the "Transport Report". Summary information for the years prior to 1985–86 was published annually in the Government's expenditure plans.

Freight Facilities Grant

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what funding the Government have provided for the freight facilities grant in each year since the scheme was established. [11302]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The following table lists the grants awarded and, where available, the spend in each year since 1975–76 in Great Britain.

Year	*Award* £	*Spend* £
1975–76	1,038,000	—
1976–77	3,332,000	—
1977–78	6,536,000	—
1978–79	6,967,000	—
1979–80	4,930,000	—
1980–81	8,078,000	—
1981–82	5,077,000	—
1982–83	3,863,000	—
1983–84	9,465,000	—
1984–85	6,213,000	—
1985–86	8,994,000	7,055,000
1986–87	1,945,000	5,739,000
1987–88	1,212,000	4,205,000
1988–89	440,000	1,600,000
1989–90	4,087,000	1,000,000
1990–91	1,188,000	3,500,000
1991–92	1,771,000	1,200,000
1992–93	7,602,000	1,700,000
1993–94	403,000	5,798,000
1994–95	2,912,000	2,800,000
1995–96	7,773,000	4,000,000
1996–97	4,359,000	3,453,000

The time needed to construct or procure capital assets means that there is inevitably a lag between award and payment of grant. In some cases where grant has been awarded, the applicant has decided not to proceed with the scheme.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Inward Investment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much inward investment, in terms of *(a)* jobs and *(b)* total spending in current prices has gone to each region of the United Kingdom in each year since 1979. [11349]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Consistently comparable figures for jobs and capital expenditure are available only from 1985–86 onwards. According to information notified to my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau, the figures are included in a table, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* US, *(b)* Japanese, *(c)* French, and *(d)* German companies have located in Britain since 1979. [11346]

Mr. McCartney: According to figures notified to my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau, the number of projects that have located in Britain since 1979 are as follows:

	Number
France	237
Germany	471
Japan	498
USA	2,241

Figures are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest. There is no requirement to notify the Department so the figures include only those projects where the IBB and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice. They take no account of subsequent developments.

Mr. Luff: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will estimate the number of new jobs created or safeguarded in each region of the United Kingdom attributed to inward investment in each year since 1979. [11196]

Mr. McCartney: Consistently comparable figures are available only from 1984–85 onwards. According to my Department's Invest In Britain Bureau, the figures are as follows:

Total associated jobs (new/safeguarded) by UK region

Year	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*North-east*	*North-west*	*Y. Humber*
1979–80	2,757	854	2,794	1,466	379	1,176
1980–81	4,474	3,332	2,760	2,923	913	890
1981–82	5,756	1,986	2,429	1,021	1,177	167
1982–83	2,258	901	1,893	539	1,291	104
1983–84	8,567	4,029	1,740	1,786	1,823	847
1984–85	8,253	9,412	6,400	2,574	4,544	1,385
1985–86	10,422	4,139	2,078	4,486	4,380	5,265
1986–87	2,608	6,559	3,428	4,593	2,575	786
1987–88	9,892	6,974	2,712	4,005	8,190	2,913
1988–89	5,575	6,259	4,257	3,289	6,368	1,956
1989–90	8,397	9,277	11,395	5,407	13,092	3,358
1990–91	6,629	8,421	2,743	2,811	11,537	11,391
1991–92	4,775	10,829	1,096	6,166	9,982	3,462
1992–93	8,686	7,321	4,099	5,522	4,775	6,815
1993–94	12,274	6,564	3,631	6,237	4,739	6,327
1994–95	10,795	5,235	5,259	9,651	7,564	7,019
1995–96	11,605	9,031	4,451	13,508	5,665	9,531
1996–97	11,997	12,653	7,205	7,563	3,075	5,333
Total	135,720	69,911	70,370	83,547	92,069	68,725

Year	*West Midlands*	*East Midlands*	*East*	*South-east*	*South-west*
1979–80	864	1,174	n/a	908	1,938
1980–81	1,040	276	n/a	1,046	1,008
1981–82	425	290	n/a	967	2,199
1982–83	100	848	n/a	1,300	1,295
1983–84	4,380	1,019	n/a	5,703	909
1984–85	2,280	961	n/a	7,412	2,084
1985–86	8,231	1,134	n/a	9,945	2,077
1986–87	7,534	382	n/a	3,513	973
1987–88	10,699	902	51	16,559	1,158
1988–89	8,792	3,260	50	3,344	513
1989–90	15,778	8,080	320	1,330	1,538
1990–91	12,132	2,061	1,188	25,227	580
1991–92	5,648	424	4,801	3,393	2,980

Year	*West Midlands*	*East Midlands*	*East*	*South-east*	*South-west*
1992–93	4,237	588	10,995	7,340	1,280
1993–94	46,439	3,428	1,713	6,866	2,177
1994–95	12,266	11,670	2,462	18,195	2,093
1995–96	11,501	2,364	2,253	21,798	5,060
1996–97	19,738	6,076	1,395	9,657	9,032
Total	172,084	44,937	25,228	144,503	38,894

n/a = (Not Available) Eastern Region figures counted within south-east figures before 1997–98.

Safeguarded job figures counted only from 1983–84 onwards.

All figures are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest. There is no requirement to notify the Department and so the figures include only those projects where the IBB and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice. They take no account of subsequent developments.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much inward investment the United Kingdom attracted in each year since 1979 in terms of *(a)* total investment expenditure at current prices, *(b)* the number of individual inward investment projects and *(c)* the number of jobs created or safeguarded as a result. [10979]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Consistently comparable figures are available only from 1984–85 onwards. According to my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau the number of inward investment successes are as follows:

Year	*Number of projects*	*Total number of jobs*	*Total investment £ billion (at current prices)*
1984–85	349	44,972	1.4
1985–86	420	52,157	1.8
1986–87	356	32,951	1.5
1987–88	363	64,060	2.2
1988–89	348	43,633	2.8
1989–90	374	77,992	5.4
1990–91	364	84,720	3.8
1991–92	353	53,626	3.2
1992–93	334	61,667	2.5
1993–94	433	100,395	4.3
1994–95	454	92,048	8.3
1995–96	495	97,782	7.5
1996–97	483	93,724	9.3

Project successes recorded: The figures above are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest. There is no requirement to notify the Department and so the figures include only those projects where the IBB and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice. They take no account of subsequent developments.

Total investment figures: The total investment figure is based on the information provided by companies. However, some companies do not wish to provide this information. Therefore, the figures above are not complete and only an indicator of the amount of investment into the UK.

Minimum Wage and Social Chapter

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the minimum wage rates in each of the EU and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, expressed in sterling, at *(a)* current exchange rates and *(b)* as a percentage of average wages in that country; and what is the current unemployment rate in each country. [11347]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The information requested about wages is not routinely collected by my Department. All the latest figures available to me are set out in the table.

Country	*Minimum wage £*[1]	*Percentage of average wage*[2]	*Unemployment rates*[3]
Belgium	699 monthly	60	9.6
Canada	£2.17 hourly	n/a	9.5
France	621 monthly	50	12.6
Greece	12 daily	62	9.7
Japan	26 daily	n/a	3.6
Luxembourg	732 monthly	56	3.7
Netherlands	651 monthly	55	5.4
New Zealand	2.45 hourly	n/a	5.9
Portugal	191 monthly	45	7.2
Spain	8.84 daily	32	20.8
USA	2.85 hourly	39	4.8

Notes:

NA=Not Available.

[1] Converted at current exchange rates 25 July 1997.

[2] Dolado et al Economic Policy No. 23

[3] Eurostat and OECD for May 1997 except Netherlands (May) New Zealand (Q4 1996) and Greece (1996)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the business organisations that have made representations to her supporting the minimum wage and the social chapter. [11345]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) on 5 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *235.*

Science Budget

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much money in current prices the science budget received in each year since 1979. [11343]

Mr. Battle: Details of the science budget since 1979–80 are set out below.

Expenditure on the Science Budget 1979–80 to 1997–98

£ million

	1979–80	*1980–81*	*1981–82*	*1982–83*	*1983–84*	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*
Cash	329.4	394.0	439.4	468.7	503.2	535.4	571.0	602.7	658.2	706
1997–98 prices	891.8	901.6	916.7	912.9	936.7	948.9	959.5	983.1	1,019.3	1,025.1

£ million

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Cash	814.4	902.0	935.6	1,056.4	1,163.1	1,220.5	1,295.1	1,319.1	1,330.4
1997–98 prices	1,104.9	1,133.1	1,104.7	1,197.2	1,280.9	1,324.1	1,367.5	1,355.4	1,330.4

1. Data are taken from appropriation accounts and supply estimates.
2. Expenditure has been repriced to 1997–98 prices using the GDP deflator.
3. Between 1992–93 and 1994–95 there was a phased transfer of funds from the higher education funding councils to the research councils amounting to £154 million in 1994–95, which was associated with the transfer of responsibility to research council project grants of any remaining direct costs except academic staff salaries and the cost of premises and central computing and an overhead contribution assessed at 40 per cent. of total direct staff costs.
4. Between 1988–89 and 1994–95 certain expenditure of the Agriculture and Food Research Council and its successor council, Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, totalling some £53 million was met from the receipts from the sale of the Plant Breeding Institute and the National Seed Development Organisation.

Radio Advertising (Wealth Warnings)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will assess the need for wealth warnings on radio advertising. [11121]

Mr. Griffiths: I shall shortly issue a consultation paper on the possibility of dispensing with wealth warnings in the broadcast media, along with a number of other proposals for simplifying and clarifying the Consumer Credit Act.

I need to ensure that any changes could be made without removing necessary consumer protection or adversely affecting competition among the various media.

Royal Greenwich Observatory

Mr. Lansley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the income from work carried out under contract at the Royal Greenwich observatory; if this is taken into account in the projected savings resulting from its closure; and if she will make a statement. [11077]

Mr. Battle: The expected income from work carried out under contract by the Royal Greenwich observatory in 1997–98 is £1.97 million. Expected income in the period 1998–99 to 2001–02 was evaluated and taken into account when the long-term benefit to the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council's programme of restructuring and co-location was determined.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the full costs of redundancy payments resulting from the closure of the Royal Greenwich observatory. [11078]

Mr. Battle: The Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council's report "Future Management of the Observatories" estimated redundancy costs of £5.085 million arising from the restructuring of the royal observatories. The PPARC has indicated that it will minimise redundancies wherever possible.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received regarding *(a)* the conducting of a full market test of the Royal Greenwich observatory and *(b)* the consideration of a management-led buy-out of the Royal Greenwich observatory; and if she will make a statement. [11299]

Mr. Battle: I have received one representation supporting a market test of the Royal Greenwich observatory and representations from three sources supporting a management-led buy-out. The Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council has made clear its interest in seeing any proposals which the current RGO management might wish to bring forward for continuing and developing much of the work currently undertaken at the RGO which will not be transferred to the new astronomy technology centre.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mrs. May: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment her Department has made of the impact on small businesses of the changes to computer equipment required to accommodate the year 2000. [9533]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 18 July 1997]:* The century date change problem is a serious issue which will affect many businesses, large and small.

Every business should consider whether its crucial business functions depend on IT systems and take action to deal with those systems. The impact will be much more serious if a business fails to take action where action is necessary. Chief executives must take this issue on board now and ensure that the survival of their business is not compromised.

Industry and Government need to work together to raise awareness and understanding of this problem and I shall be doing all I can to inject a sense of urgency across as wide a section of the industry and commerce as possible.

My Department is closely involved with Taskforce 2000, a body set up by the Confederation of British Industry and the IT industry, with our financial support, to spread awareness and co-ordinate action. I have asked officials to explore, with the taskforce and industry, what more can be done to help the private sector to tackle the problem.

On 22 July I hosted the millennium IT skills summit to tackle the shortage in skilled IT staff and I have called for a report on new initiatives in September.

Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her letter to the right hon. Member for Wokingham on the views of the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs when in opposition, if such views are permitted to be expressed when they conflict with Government policy. [10460]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* I shall not determine my policy on the issues currently being considered by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in respect of the holiday travel trade until I have received the report and had a full opportunity to consider it. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) had made it clear that he would approach the MMC report with an open mind, but he decided to stand aside from its consideration to ensure that the report would clearly be seen to be considered fairly.

British Telecommunications plc

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what licence changes the Government propose for BT. [10463]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* The Government, in consultation with Oftel, are currently considering the way forward on questions relating to the licence restrictions on BT and other public telecommunications operators, and would expect to publish proposals in the autumn for extensive consultation.

Internet (Schools)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the issue of the restriction on BT's business currently before the regulator is linked to the question of an Internet connection for every school. [10464]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* The Government are considering the issue of the regulatory restrictions which apply to BT, Mercury, Kingston and some other national public telecommunications operators. At the same time, Oftel is in discussion with the whole industry on options for delivering the Government's manifesto commitment to wire up schools to the information superhighway. Both of these issues are of key importance in the development of the UK's information society.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she expects British Telecommunications plc to offer a free Internet connection to every school. [10462]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* The Government welcome BT's proposal of a special deal for schools, which aims to link schools to the information superhighway with no connection charge, and provide access to advanced on-line services at affordable and predictable rates. The results of Oftel's current consultation on the proposal will help it to decide how to take the proposal forward so as to get the best possible deal for schools without harming competition. Whatever the final form of the proposal, the same package will be available to all schools who wish it.

It is of course up to individual institutions to decide whether and how to connect to on-line services, and to decide which services are most appropriate for them. The issue for Government is to make the options available, and to inform schools' choices. This will be promoted by the creation of the national grid for learning, on which we shall be consulting shortly.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the Council of Ministers meetings which took matters handled by her Department since 1 May, and the Ministers who represented the United Kingdom at each. [10326]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 24 July 1997]:* The Minister for Science, Energy and Industry attended the Research Council on 15 May and the Energy Council on 27 May.

The Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe attended the Internal Market Council on 20 May.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Small Firms, Trade and Industry attended the Telecoms Council on 27 June.

The Minister of State, with Ministers from the Department for Education and Employment attended the Social Affairs Council on 27 June and an informal Social Affairs Council on 3 to 6 July.

General Affairs Councils have taken trade issues but no DTI Minister has attended since 1 May.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what meetings of the Council of Ministers are planned to take DTI business up to the end of October 1997; and which DTI Ministers will be attending each. [10327]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 24 July 1997]:* Ministerial attendance at Council meetings is dependent on the agenda for each meeting.

A Telecommunications Council may take place on 2 October, which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Small Firms, Trade and Industry would plan to attend.

An informal Internal Market Council is planned to take place on 3–4 October, which the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe plans to attend.

There is a Social Affairs Council planned for 7 October, which may take issues relevant to the DTI, in which case the Minister of State may attend.

General Affairs Councils are planned for 15–16 September and 6–7 October at which trade policy issues may be taken. No decision has yet been taken on attendance by DTI ministers.

Single Currency

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she had made of the impact of a single currency meeting the Maastricht requirements on British business. [10923]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* As the Treasury booklet "EMU Practical Information for Business" makes clear, a single currency would be bound to have an impact on British business, whether or not we join. The Government will examine the impact on Britain's national economic interest, to which British business is central, whenever a decision about joining is considered.

Competitiveness

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the impact of current sterling levels relative to those 12 months ago on UK competitiveness. [10925]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The Government understand and share the concerns of exporters about the current strength of sterling.

Competitiveness, however, depends on a range of factors. I am working together with industry to ensure that the whole environment for business in Britain is as favourable as possible.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the advisory group on competitiveness will first meet; and what will be on the agenda. [10927]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The first meeting of the advisory group on competitiveness is expected to take place in September. The discussion will focus on taking forward the Government's "Competitiveness UK" initiative.

Manufacturing Exports

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations her Department has received concerning the state of manufacturing exports in the last three months. [10926]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Ministers and officials in my Department hold regular meetings with members and representatives of the UK business community. Exports are often discussed, and all concerned are keen to see them prosper.

Advisory Bodies

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the key functions of the technology foresight steering group; when the group was established; by what authority; and if she will list the names of the chairman and secretary. [9635]

Mr. Battle: The steering group was set up by the then Minister for Science in 1993 to oversee the planning and subsequent development of the technology foresight programme. Since his appointment in 1995, it has been chaired by the chief scientific adviser, Sir Robert May. The secretariat is provided by the Office of Science and Technology.

Business Links

Mr. Sanders: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 14 July, *Official Report,* column *70,* what limitations apply under European Community state aid rules in relation to business links support for small firms. [9304]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 23 July 1997]:* European Community state aid rules in relation to business link support for small firms apply to those businesses falling within the European Commission's definition of small and medium-sized enterprises.

SMEs as a whole are defined as having fewer than 250 employees and either an annual turnover up to 40 million ECUs or an annual balance sheet total up to 27 million ECUs. Businesses with fewer than 50 employees are defined as small, with either an annual turnover up to 7 million ECUs or an annual balance sheet total up to 5 million ECUs. In both cases, they should not be more than 25 per cent. owned by a larger enterprise. Finally, the Commission recognises micro enterprises as those businesses with fewer than 10 employees.

Within this definition, there is no restriction on the level of support to SMEs via the business link network where that support comprises either general information services or initial counselling.

More substantial assistance, such as consultancy, in-depth counselling or specific skills training, can be funded only up to 50 per cent. of the total cost of that assistance.

Routine or regular assistance with, for example, accountancy or taxation cannot be supported from public funds as the Commission regards this as part of the normal running costs of a company.

Biotechnology

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the names and positions of those involved in the UK working party on the European directive relating to patenting and biotechnologies; what timetable they are working to; and what will be the nature of the consultation process relating to this work. [10638]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 24 July 1997]:* Delegations to the Council working group dealing with the Commission's proposed directive on legal protection of biotechnical inventions consist of officials from the Patents Office. Personnel may vary according to agenda items under discussion.

The European Parliament produced its first opinion on the Commission's proposal at its vote on 16 July, and is seeking some 70 amendments to the Commission's text. We expect the Commission to respond with an amended proposal. When this emerges it will be put before the Council working group for discussion. The current presidency, Luxembourg, of the European Union has outlined its programme for meetings of the working group as 10-11 September, 6-7 and 27-28 October, and 6-7 November 1997, although these may vary depending upon the availability of the Commission's amended proposal.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action she is taking to boost biotechnology-based business in the United Kingdom. [10076]

Mr. Battle: My Department is fully committed to strengthening our highly successful UK biotechnology industry. This will be achieved by both securing greater exploitation of our science base and by raising the awareness of opportunities offered by biotechnology to a wide range of industrial sectors.

On 11 July, my Department announced a second call for proposals under two initiatives, with the aim of improving competitiveness in the sector. The business mentoring and incubator challenge is designed to encourage intermediaries to address the management and business skills required by emerging biotechnology companies. The biotechnology exploitation platforms challenge aims to retain the benefits of publicly funded bioscience research in the UK, by promoting better management and exploitation of intellectual property.

In addition, my Department continues to promote biotechnology research and development in industry through a range of schemes, including SMART, LINK and EUREKA, which are targeted at small firms and collaborative research projects.

These departmental initiatives help companies to profit from the results of more than £500 million per annum currently spent by the public sector on biotechnology-related research.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which her Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10743]

Mr. Griffiths: The Department of Trade and Industry is responsible for all its payroll functions. In discharging these responsibilities the Department utilises a combination of an in-house pay operations unit for gross pay purposes and external contractors for net pay, Chessington Computer Services Limited, and accounting purposes—CSL Managed Services. The information on the costs of systems and processes would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many and what percentage of employees in her private office are *(a)* of Asian origin and *(b)* of Afro-Caribbean origin. [9580]

Mrs. Beckett: It is not normal practice in my Department to answer questions about small numbers of staff, in order to preserve personal confidentiality unless individuals are content for this information to be provided. Of the 12 staff in my private office two or 17 per cent. are of Asian origin and two or 17 per cent. are of Afro-Caribbean origin.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Welsh: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to change the system of industrial tribunals; and if she will make a statement. [10310]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The Government are fully committed to the industrial tribunals system, which plays an important role in resolving employment rights disputes. It is important that, where we can, we take steps to improve both the services offered by the tribunals and the system of dispute resolution. To this end the Government are giving their full support to a Bill which Lord Archer of Sandwell introduced in the House of Lords on 9 July 1997. The Employment Rights (Dispute Resolution) Bill, which received its Second Reading on 25 July, will streamline certain tribunal procedures and will promote voluntary alternative forms of dispute resolution, such as arbitration. These changes, which have been the subject of full consultation, will improve the service offered by the tribunals and give those involved in employment rights disputes additional methods of resolving their disputes.

Information Society

Sir Richard Body: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what studies have been commissioned, and what legislation is under consideration, by the European Commission concerning *(a)* social cohesion and social exclusion and *(b)* regional cohesion in respect of the information society; and if she will make a statement. [10199]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 22 July 1997]:* Details of the European Commission's activities in these areas are set out in the Commission's Communications COM(96) 607 final "Europe at the Forefront of the Information Society: Rolling Action Plan", and COM (97) 7 final "Cohesion and the Information Society", as well as in its Green Paper COM(96) 389 final "Living and Working in the Information Society: People First", all of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

The Commission's High Level Expert Group on the Social and Societal Aspects of the Information Society has recently presented a report to the Commission entitled "Building a European Information Society for us all".

Before 1999, the Commission will propose revised regulations or amendments to regulations for structural and cohesion funds. Elements of the structural funds are used to support projects related to the information society.

Power Stations

Mrs. Browning: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her Department's policy towards new applications for *(a)* oil-fired, *(b)* solid fuel and *(c)* gas-fired power stations. [11097]

Mr. Battle: When assessing applications made under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 we will address local issues and ensure consistency with the wider objectives of secure, diverse and sustainable supplies of energy at competitive prices and meeting of environmental targets.

Solar Power

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to increase the proportion of electricity in the United Kingdom generated by solar power. [11285]

Mr. Battle: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke on Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 10 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *417*. We are currently reviewing policy in this area, including what would be necessary and practicable to achieve 10 per cent. of the UK's electricity needs from renewables by the year 2010. The Government's support for solar energy will be considered in the context of this review.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the share of the global market in solar power held by British companies. [11229]

Mr. Battle: The solar energy—photovoltaic—industry has estimated in its draft strategy, as part of the Government's foresight energy initiative, that UK-based companies currently have 9 per cent. of the world market across the wide variety of PV applications.

Non-status Lending

Mr Illsley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will bring forward legislation to implement the guidelines issued by the Director General of Fair Trading on non-status lending. [11183]

Mr. Griffiths: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmore Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on 18 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *372*.

War Pensions

Mr. Goggins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if she will list those local authorities in England which fully disregard war pensions when calculating council tax benefits and housing benefit; [9141]

(2) if she will list those local authorities in England which do not fully disregard war pensions when calculating council tax benefit and housing benefit, indicating the level of disregard applied in each case. [9140]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I have been asked to reply.

We do routinely collect information on discretionary local schemes for housing and council tax benefits as any such scheme must be funded from an authority's own resources and, therefore, the decision to operate such a scheme is entirely for local authorities. The information requested is therefore not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

WALES

Commercial Lobbyists

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) on what dates since 1 May *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have met commercial lobbyists to discuss matters relating to the business of his Department; and if he will introduce a register of such meetings; [8059]

(2) on what dates since 1 May *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have attended meetings with organisations representing (i) commercial and (ii) non-commercial interests organised by commercial lobbying firms; and if he will introduce a register of such meetings. [8060]

Mr. Ron Davies: It is not my intention to hold or attend meetings solely for the purpose of discussing Members' interests and I therefore have no plans to introduce a register.

Devolution Referendum

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 9 July, *Official Report*, column *509*, concerning the referendum on Welsh devolution, what steps his Department will take to ensure that blind and partially sighted voters are aware of the availability of postal votes before the proposed referendum. [9422]

Mr. Ron Davies: My Department will liaise with the Royal National Institute for the Blind and will make information available via the various "talking newspapers" in Wales on the timetable for making applications for postal or proxy votes.

Employment Advertisements

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how often since 1992 his Department has been responsible for employment advertisements that contained age restrictions on those who could apply. [9498]

Mr. Ron Davies: Not at all.

"A Voice for Wales"

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if "A Voice for Wales" represented Government policy. [9881]

Mr. Ron Davies: I published the White Paper, "A Voice for Wales", on 22 July 1997: it represents the proposals of Her Majesty's Government for a Welsh Assembly and reflects the clear manifesto pledge on which the Labour party in Wales won 34 out of 40 seats in the general election.

Welsh Assembly

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what estimate he has made of the potential level of saving relating to non-departmental public bodies under a Welsh Assembly that could not be achieved under present arrangements; [9903]

(2) if he will invite the National Audit Office to validate estimates of savings that can be made in non-departmental public bodies and public services by the Welsh Assembly. [9880]

Mr. Ron Davies: Our plans for a Welsh Assembly provide both for the rationalisation of non-departmental public bodies in Wales before it is established and the power for the Assembly to continue this process afterwards. I expect that both elements will yield long-term savings in the form of economies of scale, reduced duplication of effort and lower administration costs. However, it is impossible at this early stage to provide a quantified estimate of such savings, particularly as future decisions will be in the hands of the Assembly itself. Our proposals are in line with the election manifesto.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 23 July, *Official Report*, columns *638–39*, if he will ask the National Audit Office to review the estimates and the assumptions used to make them relating to the establishment and running costs of a Welsh assembly. [11164]

Mr. Davies: No. As I said in my answer of 23 July to my right hon. Friend, the figures I published are estimates of what the Assembly itself might decide to spend, not Government expenditure plans, and I have clearly set out the assumptions used. It would not be appropriate to ask the National Audit Office to investigate such matters.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10737]

Mr. Ron Davies: In 1996–97, the last year for which figures are available, the Department's pay section and finance division collated and processed payments in respect of its own staff and the staff of the office of Her Majesty's chief inspectorate of schools in Wales, including basic pay, tax and other deductions, overtime, and so on.

Staff employed on a casual basis and a number of miscellaneous payments for services were paid by the finance division, all other staff were paid by the Chessington Computer Services Ltd., via the SPIRE system—standard payroll input and retrieval system.

The total cost of providing this service in 1996–97 was £269,000.

Quangos

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the quangos for which his Department is responsible and indicate the size of their budgets and the names, dates of appointment and retirement and salaries of all paid appointees. [10749]

Mr. Ron Davies: The non-departmental public bodies for which the Secretary of State for Wales is responsible are listed, together with total gross expenditure budgets and numbers of board appointments, in the annual Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies". Further details of appointments, including names, dates of appointment and retirement and salaries are published in the quarterly publication "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales".

Copies of both publications are available in the Library of the House.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funding is presently committed from his Departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999-00 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and whether he will make a statement. [11378]

Mr. Ron Davies: There is at present no specifically dedicated budget for this purpose. The Department's main information systems platform is not affected. Remedial work needed on earlier systems is being assessed and any costs will be met from future information systems budgets.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer–related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–00; and if he will make a statement. [11382]

Mr. Davies: Present plans for expenditure are as follows:

	Current	*Capital*
1995–96	2,289,835,55	919,099.59
1996–97	2,384,779.31	1,741,681.88
1997–98	4,897,000.00	1,000,000.00
1998–99	4,897,000.00	600,000.00
1999–00	4,897,000.00	600,000.00

Expenditure on computer-related work is kept under review to ensure that it meets my Department's operational needs.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was public spending per head in Wales as a percentage of public spending per head in England in 1996–97. [11358]

Mr. Ron Davies: Information for 1996–97 will be published in the Treasury's public expenditure statistical analysis in March 1998. Identifiable general Government expenditure per head in Wales was 16 per cent. higher than in England in 1995–96.

Some 42 per cent. of identifiable Government expenditure in Wales is social security, where a number of economic factors result in high levels of social security expenditure in relation to England.

Owner-Occupation

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of homes in Wales were owner occupied in each year since 1979. [11192]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Information on the proportion of owner occupied homes in each year from 1979 is given in the following table:

Proportion of owner-occupied homes in Wales[1]

	Owner occupied homes (per cent.)
1979	59.3
1980	59.7
1981	62.4
1982	63.8
1983	64.6
1984	65.1
1985	66.0
1986	66.7
1987	67.8
1988	69.1
1989	70.5
1990	70.8
1991	70.9
1992	71.0
1993	71.1
1994	71.1
1995	71.2
1996	71.3

[1] At 31 December. The breakdown of dwelling stock by tenure is estimated from census information, local authority returns and housing association returns.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what investment Dwr Cymru has made in the water and sewerage system *(a)* in total and *(b)* per household in each year since 1987. [11190]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information is set out in the following tables. Full report year investment data are not available from 1987–88 to 1989–90. Total investment figures for these years in respect of the Welsh Water authority are given in "Waterfacts 93" published by the Water Services Association, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Dwr Cymru—total capital investment

£ million

(1996–97 prices)[2]	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*[1]	*Total 1990–97*
Water service	105.0	117.1	116.7	112.9	116.5	110.0	—	678.3
Sewerage service	84.9	97.5	105.5	82.6	87.7	114.6	—	572.7
Total investment	189.9	214.6	222.2	195.6	204.2	224.6	253.0	1,504.0

Notes:

[1] Only total investment in 1996–97 is available in the public domain.

[2] Retail prices index used to obtain 1996–97 prices.

Source:

Office of Water Services.

Dwr Cymru—total capital investment per household

£/connected property	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*[3]	*Total 1990–97*
Water service[1]	8.4	9.3	9.3	9.0	9.3	8.8	—	54.0
Sewerage Service[2]	6.6	7.6	8.2	6.5	6.9	9.0	—	44.8
Total Investment	15.0	17.0	17.5	15.5	16.1	17.7	19.9	98.8

Notes:

[1] Calculated on the basis of the total number of properties—domestic and non-domestic—connected to the distribution system at the end of the year.

[2] Calculated on the basis of the total number of domestic properties connected to the sewerage system at the end of the year.

[3] Only total investment in 1996–97 is available in the public domain.

Source:

Office of Water Services.

LG Investment

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much LG has announced that it will invest in Imperial park, Newport; and how many jobs this will create. [11263]

Mr. Hain: When the project was announced on 10 July last year, LG confirmed its intention to invest £1.7 billion at Imperial park in a project that will create 6,100 new direct jobs.

Higher and Further Education

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many students were enrolled in *(a)* higher education and *(b)* further education for each year since 1979. [11189]

Mr. Hain: Figures related to the number of students on further and higher education courses in Wales since 1979–80 are provided in the following table:

Students on further and higher education courses in Wales[1]

Academic year	*Open University courses*[2]	*Higher education courses at University of Wales*[3]	*Higher education courses at further and higher education institutions*[3]	*Total higher education courses*	*Further education courses at further and higher education institutions*	*Total higher education and further education courses*
1979–80	n/a	20,789	12,980	33,769	60,712	94,481
1980–81	n/a	21,667	13,722	35,389	57,783	93,172
1981–82	n/a	21,300	14,973	36,273	61,668	97,941
1982–83	2,858	20,888	15,782	39,528	60,158	99,686
1983–84	2,988	20,050	17,537	40,575	64,751	105,326
1984–85	3,006	20,486	18,083	41,575	62,257	103,832
1985–86	3,170	21,520	19,134	43,824	62,821	106,645
1986–87	3,257	22,674	19,774	45,705	66,981	112,686
1987–88	3,416	22,886	20,207	46,509	69,837	116,346

Students on further and higher education courses in Wales[1]

Academic year	Open University courses[2]	Higher education courses at University of Wales[3]	Higher education courses at further and higher education institutions[3]	Total higher education courses	Further education courses at further and higher education institutions	Total higher education and further education courses
1988–89	3,492	23,167	21,314	47,973	74,622	122,595
1989–90	3,607	24,577	22,455	50,639	78,813	129,452
1990–91	3,852	26,170	23,938	53,960	80,270	134,230
1991–92	3,980	29,487	27,775	61,242	85,004	146,246
1992–93	4,182	33,112	33,005	70,299	89,688	159,987
1993–94	4,376	36,390	37,022	77,788	92,851	170,639
1994–95	4,441	[3]—	79,323	83,764	100,506	184,270
1995–96[5]	n/a	[3]—	91,022	n/a	125,928	n/a
1996–97[5]	n/a	[3]—	93,508	n/a	n/a	n/a

Notes:

[1] At November or December for further education colleges, higher education institutions or universities depending on the source. At January for the Open university. Excludes courses run by the Workers Educational Association, the Young Men's Christian Association, sponsored institutions and adult education centres.

[2] Data not available prior to 1982–83 and for 1995–96 or 1996–97.

[3] In the autumn 1994 higher education was collected on a United Kingdom basis by the Higher Education Statistics Agency for all higher education institutions (including universities). Data for 1996–97 exclude higher education courses at further education colleges.

[4] Includes Coleg Harlech from 1992–93 and sixth form colleges from 1993–94. Data for 1996–97 are not available.

[5] Data are provisional.

Sources:

Further Education Students Record, Open University, Universities Statistical Record, Higher Education Statistics Agency and the Further Education Funding Council for Wales.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much at current prices was spent on the NHS in Wales in each year since 1979. [11193]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information is as follows:

1996–97 prices

Year	Net expenditure (£ million)	Uplift factor	Net expenditure (£ million)
1978–79	397.8	3.075	1,223.4
1979–80	465.5	2.635	1,226.6
1980–81	598.6	2.227	1,333.1
1981–82	682.1	2.031	1,385.1
1982–83	750.2	1.896	1,422.1
1983–84	796.2	1.812	1,442.4
1984–85	861.0	1.725	1,485.1
1985–86	919.5	1.635	1,503.7
1986–87	988.2	1.587	1,568.6
1987–88	1,097.5	1.507	1,654.1
1988–89	1,220.5	1.413	1,724.1
1989–90	1,324.4	1.320	1,748.8
1990–91	1,490.6	1.223	1,822.4
1991–92	1,710.1	1.149	1,965.3
1992–93	1,912.9	1.103	2,109.8
1993–94	1,986.6	1.072	2,129.2
1994–95	2,076.6	1.056	2,192.6
1995–96	2,178.3	1.028	2,238.5
1996–97	2,291.3	1.000	2,291.3

Inward Investment

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was *(a)* the total value of inward investment in current prices, *(b)* the number of inward investment projects and *(c)* the number of jobs created or safeguarded in Wales by inward investment in each year since 1983. [11262]

Mr. Hain: The following table provides details of inward investment into Wales on a financial year basis since 1983–84. The figures are based on information provided by the companies at the time of the decision to invest. They take no account of any subsequent developments.

Inward investment into Wales

Year	1 Projects	2 New jobs	3 Safe jobs	4 Capital investment £ million	5 Based on 1996–97 constant prices £ million
1983–84	29	3,185	1,956	222,128	402,406
1984–85	50	4,993	2,742	134,060	231,242
1985–86	69	5,496	1,433	151,692	248,061
1986–87	100	4,578	3,027	213,771	339,335
1987–88	103	8,475	1,933	371,638	560,118
1988–89	96	11,924	1,527	1,115.461	1,575.732
1989–90	120	6,359	5,986	593,523	783,694
1990–91	147	8,907	6,064	585,139	715,381
1991–92	208	9,133	7,646	1,155,224	1,327,615

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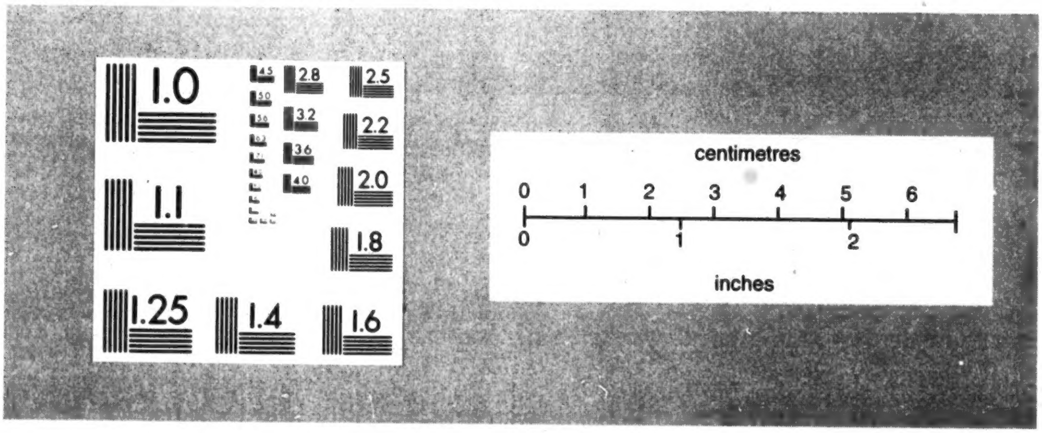

Inward investment into Wales

Year	1 *Projects*	2 *New jobs*	3 *Safe jobs*	4 *Capital investment £ million*	5 *Based on 1996–97 constant prices £ million*
1992–93	201	6,627	7,231	949,462	1,047,174
1993–94	169	8,081	5,856	765,143	820,054
1994–95	131	5,603	3,563	920,742	972,160
1995–96	122	6,800	5,848	976,174	1,003.138
1996–97	136	13,798	3,059	2,954.552	2,954.552
Total	1,681	103,959	57,871	11,108.709	12,980.52

Source:

Columns 1 to 4—Inward investment database managed by the Welsh Development Agency.

Column 5—Calculations made by the Welsh Office's EcAD.

Benefit Dependence

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each county council, and for Wales, the latest numbers of those of working age estimated to be dependent on benefits, and comparative figures for the United Kingdom. [8218]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 15 July 1997]:* I have been asked to reply.

Our objectives are to promote work incentives, to strengthen community and family life, and to reduce poverty and welfare dependency.

The information requested is not available. However, the number in receipt of income support, the safety net benefit of last resort in Great Britain, Wales and counties in Wales is shown in the table:

Income support claimants aged under 60

	All	*Claimants*	*Partners*
Great Britain	4,524,000	3,879,000	644,000
Wales	249,000	211,000	38,000
Clwyd	30,000	26,000	4,000
Dyfed	28,000	23,000	5,000
Gwent	39,000	33,000	6,000
Gwynedd	20,000	16,000	3,000
Mid Glamorgan	54,000	45,000	9,000
Powys	5,000	4,000	1,000
South Glamorgan	37,000	33,000	4,000
West Glamorgan	35,000	30,000	5,000

Notes:

1. For the analysis, working age has been defined as below the age of 60.
2. If the claimant is of working age then the partner, if present, is counted regardless of their age.
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand and as such totals may not tally.
4. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and as such are subject to a degree of sampling error.
5. Figures include unemployed people who received income support at August 1996 (pre-dating the introduction of jobseeker's allowance in October 1996).

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, November 1995.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to amend the regulations to allow those on attendance allowance, but ineligible for disability living allowance, to qualify for mobility allowance. [1290]

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make it her policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if she will make a statement. [1668]

Mr. Denham: The Government recognise the importance of disability living allowance in enabling individuals to enjoy greater dignity and independence. We wish to ensure that the benefits system provides appropriate support to those in greatest need. We are planning to review provision in this area and will announce the scope of this review in due course.

The mobility element in disability living allowance is intended to reflect the identified need of those who suffer disability before retirement. The extension of the mobility component to those aged over 65 years, the age at which one may be eligible for attendance allowance, would cost an estimated £4 billion for 1997–98 and in the current circumstances it would be unlikely that such a significant extension of entitlement would attract priority.

Notes:

1. Estimate is for the full year 1997–98 and is in 1997–98 prices.
2. Estimate is based on disability living allowance case load statistics and the disability survey 1985.
3. Estimate is subject to a considerable margin of error and should be treated with caution.

War Pensions

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will review the legislative and regulatory provisions relating to entitlement to war pensions in respect of noise-induced hearing loss in addition to the medical and scientific review. [3565]

Mr. Denham: The independent review arises solely from our desire to show that the scientific evidence is clear and unambiguous for the purposes of assessing disablement under the existing legislation. We have no plans to review the legal provisions themselves.

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to review the discretion which local authorities have to vary the level of war pension which is disregarded when calculating housing and council tax benefit. [9142]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The present arrangements for disregarding war pensions aim to strike a balance between acknowledging the special reasons for payment of the pension and the proper use of public funds. War pensioners already receive preferential treatment and benefit from many advantages over their social security counterparts.

The discretion that local authorities have to disregard a war disablement pension or a war widow's pension combined with the statutory disregard afford a special treatment to war pensioners and war widows.

We have no plans to review the present arrangements for disregarding war pensions.

Poverty

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the estimated number of pensioner households officially living in poverty in *(a)* Britain, *(b)* Nottinghamshire and *(c)* the Gedling parliamentary constituency; and what were the figures (i) 10 and (ii) 20 years ago; [4383]

(2) what is the estimated number of families officially living in poverty in *(a)* Britain, *(b)* Nottinghamshire and *(c)* the Gedling parliamentary constituency; and what were the figures (i) 10 and (ii) 20 years ago; [4382]

(3) what is the estimated number of children living in poverty in *(a)* Britain, *(b)* Nottinghamshire and *(c)* the Gedling parliamentary constituency; and what were the figures (i) 10 and (ii) 20 years ago. [4384]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information requested is not available. The policies of the previous Administration led to poverty and social division throughout Britain. The Government are committed to mounting a concerted attack against the worklessness which is causing social and economic inequality and welfare dependency.

Information on those with low incomes is available in the Government Statistical Service publication, "Households Below Average Income". This annual report seeks to measure potential living standards derived from goods and services financed from disposable income. It provides a range of statistics monitoring the characteristics of people at various points in the income distribution, and describes how changes in income over time have affected particular groups. Complementary information is provided on possession of consumer durables and on household expenditure.

"Households Below Average Income" was last published in November 1996, and a copy is in the Library.

UK Pensioners Overseas

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what policy she will adopt on the payment of annual increments to United Kingdom pensioners living overseas. [6155]

Mr. Denham: The Government have no plans at present to change the policy that state retirement pensions are uprated only within the European Economic Area and in certain countries with which the United Kingdom has a social security agreement which provides for uprating.

It would cost some £255 million per year fully to unfreeze those pensions which are not uprated—that is, to bring them up to the rate which would be paid if the pensioners were in the UK. There are competing demands and constraints on social security spending, and it would be wrong to raise expectations that uprating these pensions would be likely to attract priority in current circumstances.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to review the workings of the compensation recovery unit. [6874]

Mr. Denham: We plan to bring the provisions of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997 into force on 6 October. The Act will reform the compensation recovery scheme following a report of the Social Security Select Committee. The Act will ensure that compensation in respect of pain and suffering cannot be reduced on account of recovery of social security benefits. It will also protect public funds by ensuring that all recoverable benefits paid as a consequence of accident, injury or disease are repaid by the compensator.

We will monitor the effects of the reformed scheme and consider whether any further changes are appropriate. In doing so we will have regard to the rights and responsibilities of all parties affected by the benefit recovery process.

Claimants From Overseas

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who are the subject of sponsorship undertakings have had *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit (i) refused and (ii) curtailed under the rules brought in by SI 1996 No. 30 Social Security (Persons From Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996. [7172]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are committed to a wide-ranging review of the major components of the social security system: our aim is to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to promote work incentives.

The information requested is not available as data held on sponsored immigrants' benefits do not specify the reason for the refusal of benefit.

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people subject to sponsorship undertakings have been awarded *(a)* income support, as an urgent case, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit, due to the death of their sponsor. [7180]

Mr. Bradley: We are committed to a wide ranging review of the major component of the social security system: our aim is to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to promote work incentives.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

Between May 1996 and April 1997, one person was awarded income support due to the death of their sponsor.

Information on the number of people awarded housing benefit and council tax benefit is not available.

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary for Social Security how many asylum seekers have had child benefit (i) refused and (ii) curtailed under the rules brought in by SI 1996 Nos. 2327 and 2530 on child benefit since 7 October 1996. [7173]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are committed to a wide-ranging review of social security. With the Home Office, the Department of Health and other Departments, we shall consider all arrangements for asylum seekers to ensure they are dealt with fairly and promptly.

Restrictions, to all persons subject to immigration control and not just to asylum seekers, are applied under section 146A of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992. The statutory instruments referred to provide exemption from the general restriction for certain categories.

Information on the number of asylum seekers whose child benefit claims have been disallowed since 7 October 1996 is not available.

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many asylum seekers have had *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit, *(c)* council tax benefit, *(d)* disability living allowance, *(e)* attendance allowance, *(f)* family credit, *(g)* severe disablement allowance, *(h)* invalid care allowance and (i) disability working allowance 1. refused and 2. curtailed under the provisions of SI 1996 No. 30 Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations. [7174]

Mr. Bradley: We are committed to a wide-ranging review of social security. With the Home Office, the Department of Health and other Departments, we will consider all arrangements for asylum seekers to ensure they are dealt with fairly and promptly.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available on asylum seekers is in the table.

Income support claims from asylum seekers: May 1996 to April 1997

Income support	*Numbers*
In-country asylum claimants refused income support[1]	1,309
Income support claims from asylum applicants curtailed[2]	936

Notes:

[1] Figures are for those claimants refused income support past the introduction of the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Regulations 1996.

[2] Figures are for those applicants whose income support claims are curtailed as a result of a negative decision by the Home Office on their asylum application post the introduction of the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Regulations 1996.

Source:

Clerical management statistics (not validated).

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the costs to the Benefits Agency resulting from the repeal of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. [7558]

Mr. Bradley: We are committed to a wide- ranging review of the major components of the social security system. Our aim is to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to promote work incentives.

We have made clear that we are committed to a wide-ranging review of social security. With the Home Office, the Department of Health and other Departments, we will consider all arrangements for asylum seekers to ensure they are dealt with fairly and promptly.

Earnings Limits

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to alter the limit set in 1988 on earnings allowed before such earnings are taken into account in calculations of benefits. [7239]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government believe that work is the best form of welfare for people of working age. Our welfare to work objectives are to provide work incentives, to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to strike a new balance between rights and responsibilities.

Over the next few months we shall be looking closely at all the features of the benefit system which might have an impact on work incentives. A key priority will be to consider carefully support which enables people to make the transition from benefit into employment. We need to encourage those who wish to do some part-time work without creating a disincentive to take up full--time work. This is exactly the sort of issue we will be looking at as part of our welfare-to-work measures.

Local Councillors

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to review the treatment of local councillors' attendance allowances for the purposes of *(a)* income support and *(b)* other benefit entitlement. [7445]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Councillors already receive more favourable treatment in income support and jobseeker's allowance compared with most other claimants, including an exemption from the remunerative work rules. However, we shall be looking at all features of the benefit system as part of our review of social security.

Pensioner Incomes Review

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how the review of pensioners' incomes will operate; and how much it will cost. [7560]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollock (Mr. Davidson) on 17 July, *Official Report*, columns *239–41*.

In keeping with our commitment to manage within current cash targets, the cost of the pensions review will be absorbed within the Department's existing running costs limit.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to abolish the jobseeker's allowance. [7564]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government believe that work is the best form of welfare for people of working age, and our welfare-to-work objectives are to provide work incentives, to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to strike a new balance between rights and responsibilities. An extensive programme of monitoring and evaluation is under way to enable us to ensure that jobseeker's allowance is achieving these objectives.

Unemployed People (Borrowing)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she plans to let unemployed people begin borrowing against future earnings; and what estimate she has made of the cost of the scheme in each of the next three years. [7562]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government believe that work is the best form of welfare for people of working age. Our welfare-to-work objectives are to provide work incentives, to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to strike a new balance between rights and responsibilities.

Over the next few months we shall be looking closely at all the features of the benefit system which might have an impact on work incentives. A key priority will be to consider carefully support which enables people to make the transition from benefit into employment.

Family Credit Take-up

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to increase the take-up of family credit; and how much she estimates this will cost. [7557]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are committed to streamlining and modernising the tax and benefit systems to fulfil the objectives of promoting work incentives, reducing poverty and welfare dependency and strengthening community and family life.

We launched the first phase of the new deal for lone parents on 21 July in eight areas across England, Scotland and Wales.

This will offer lone parents whose youngest child is at school an interview with a personal adviser which will include personalised advice on in-work benefits and in particular family credit.

We also recently announced that Martin Taylor, chief executive of Barclays plc, will lead a Whitehall task force to review this area.

Single Room Rent Allowance

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much she estimates that her changes to housing benefit regulations will cost. [7561]

Mr. Keith Bradley: My. right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 18 June her intention to revoke the extension of the single room rent allowance to single people between the ages of 25 and 59. This measure was inherited from the previous Administration and they estimated that the savings were £6 million 1997–98, £47 million in 1998–99 and £69 million in 1999–00. The revocation of the measure will therefore cost these sums.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) which rates of non-dependant charges will be increased to fund the withdrawal of the single room rent allowance for single people aged 25 to 59 years living in the private rented sector; and what the increase for each non-dependant rate will be; [10932]

(2) when non-dependant charges will be increased to fund the withdrawal of the single room rent allowance for single people aged 25 to 59 years living in the private rented sector; and what the transitional protection arrangements will be. [10933]

Mr. Bradley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced, as part of our commitment to keep spending within the planned ceiling for social security expenditure, our decision to adjust the levels of non-dependant deductions from April 1998, and our intention to protect those in greatest need. A final decision on the levels of deductions will not be taken until our annual review of benefit rates is completed later in the year. We will announce the outcome of the review on non-dependant deductions at that time.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the withdrawal of the single room rent allowance for single people aged 25 to 59 years living in the private rented sector is to be funded solely by increasing non-dependant charges. [10934]

Mr. Bradley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Burgon) on 2 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *207–09*.

The measures announced will ensure that we meet our commitment to keep spending within the planned ceiling for social security expenditure.

Pensions Entitlement

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the cost of introducing a pensions entitlement. [7563]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollock (Mr. Davidson) on17 July, *Official Report*, columns *239–41*.

National Insurance

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the effect on Government revenues in a full year of *(a)* a £10 and *(b)* a £100 increase in the real level of the national insurance contribution ceiling. [8199]

Mr. Denham: The estimated effects on national insurance contribution revenue for 1998–99 are +£190 million and +£1,505 million respectively.

Notes:

1. The figures assume that the weekly upper earnings limit on employees' class 1 contributions would be increased by an additional £10 and £100 from April 1998, and that corresponding increases would be made to the upper profits limit on class 4 contributions paid by self-employed people.

2. The figures also assume that the additional increases would not be applied to tne upper earnings limit used for the calculation of employee and employer contracted-out rebates, that the current 10 per cent. class 1 contribution rate would apply to earnings above the present upper earnings limit and that the current 6 per cent. class 4 contribution rate would apply to profits above the present upper profits limit.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the effect on Government revenues in a full year of *(a)* a freeze and *(b)* a £10 reduction in the level of the 5 per cent., 7 per cent. and 10 per cent. thresholds for employers' national insurance contributions. [8201]

Mr. Denham: The estimated effects on national insurance contribution revenue for 1998–99 are +£125 million and +£355 million respectively.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the main taxable benefits in kind which are not subject to national insurance contributions. [8202]

Mr. Denham: The information is in the table:

Type of taxable benefit	*Net amount chargeable to tax (1995–96)*
Private medical insurance	£650 million
Ownership of cars and property transferred to employee	£200 million
Beneficial loans	£200 million
Living accommodation	£170 million

Notes:

1. This figure is likely to include some payments by employers made to third parties on behalf of employees which are subject to class 1 NICs.

2. Regulations exclude payments in kind, services, facilities and accommodation from class 1 NICs. These are not identical with taxable benefits declared on the P11D but the two are broadly similar and therefore the figures on the right hand side give a good indication of the amounts of taxable benefits not subject to NICs.

Source:

Inland Revenue—taxable benefits specifically reported on form P11D.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the cost to *(a)* employers and *(b)* the Exchequer of extending entitlement to statutory sick pay to employees with earnings below the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions assuming that (i) entitlement is at the standard rate of SSP and (ii) entitlement is limited to a replacement of normal earnings, giving figures (1) gross and (2) net of any savings in other benefits. [8197]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

We aim to ensure a measure of financial help for people during short periods of sickness; to support employers, particularly small businesses, in their administration of the statutory sick pay scheme; and to secure value for taxpayers' money.

Based upon Government Actuary's Department best estimates of SSP case load, it is estimated that providing sickness cover to employees earning below the lower earnings limit equivalent to the standard rate of SSP would cost approximately £120 million at 1996–97 levels.

Statutory Maternity Pay

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the effect on Government revenues in a full year of a 1 per cent. change in the employers' standard recovery rate for statutory maternity pay. [8200]

Mr. Denham: We aim to help women balance their careers and family responsibilities; to support employers, particularly small businesses, in their administration of the statutory maternity pay scheme; and to ensure value for taxpayers' money.

The standard recovery rate of SMP for large employers is 92 per cent. It is estimated that a 1 per cent. adjustment in the standard rate would lead to a change in Government revenues of £5 million in 1998–99. Small businesses are able to recover SMP costs in full.

Accommodation Costs Review

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will give for the review of regulations restricting the eligibility of single claimants other than young people to accommodation costs *(a)* the expected completion date and *(b)* the cost of conducting the review. [8255]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The decision to revoke the regulations, which would have restricted housing benefit for single claimants aged 25 to 59, was announced on 18 June by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

The draft regulations to bring about the change were referred, in accordance with the statutory requirement to do so, on 11 July to the social security advisory committee and the local authority associations for their consideration. Subject to their views, the regulations will be made and laid as soon as possible.

The review was conducted as part of the Government's overall review of the package of measures we inherited from the previous Administration. It was an internal review, carried out as part of the Government's day-to-day business. I am therefore unable to give a cost which relates specifically to this issue.

Stationery

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much her Department spent on stationery provision in respect of paper items in each of the last five years. [8868]

Mr. Field: Information is not available in the format requested.

Details of departmental expenditure on printing and stationery in the last five years are as follows:

1992–93: £45,405,909

1993–94: £53,417,645

1994–95: £53,741,136

1995–96: £64,162,566

1996–97: £58,229,968.

Notes:

1. Departmental expenditure on printing of forms, leaflets etc. and procurement of desk top equipment such as staplers, pens, calculators and paper is brought to account against one general heading of "printing and stationery".

2. The production costs of instruments of payment—such as order books and girocheques—are not included as a general printing and stationery expense.

Housing Benefit (Blackpool)

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently claiming housing benefit in Blackpool. [8681]

Mr. Keith Bradley: At the end of November 1996, there were 14,910 recipients of housing benefit in Blackpool. A recipient may be a single person or a couple.

Source:

Housing Benefit Management Information System, quarterly 100 per cent. case load count with and without income support taken at the end of November 1996.

Benefit Disregards

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to vary benefit disregards for the disabled. [8909]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are committed to a review with the objective of reducing poverty and welfare dependency and promoting work incentives. Provision for disabled people will form part of that review.

Industrial Injury Benefit

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to review the Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1997 as they relate to the backdating of industrial injuries disablement benefit, with particular references to the award of benefit to claimants suffering industrial injury from asbestosis or mesothelioma; and if she will make a statement. [8933]

Mr. Denham: In our manifesto we promised to build a modern welfare state. The publication of the Social Security Bill on 10 July 1997 was a key step towards this aim.

We are determined that making a claim should be a straightforward matter for those entitled to benefit. The Social Security Bill provides for equal treatment when claiming social security benefits, including industrial injuries disablement benefit, with entitlement for a past period restricted to one month. Those suffering from asbestos related diseases have benefited from improvements to the rules that came into force from 9 April 1997, which include the removal of the 90-day waiting period for sufferers from mesothelioma and the widening of the range of occupations covered for this disease.

State Earnings-related Pensions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will give an undertaking that the value of SERPS will be uprated in exact line with prices during the lifetime of the present Parliament. [8991]

Mr. Denham: We have announced a wide-ranging review of all aspects of pensions. Our long-term objective is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to build up an adequate pension to guarantee security in retirement. We will retain SERPS for those who wish to remain in it and introduce a citizenship pension to help people who lose out on pension entitlements because they assume responsibility as carers.

We aim to build a society in which there is a wide consensus on the future for pensions, both now and tomorrow, and to provide dignity in retirement for the whole nation.

The Government have no plans to bring forward in the review proposals to change the uprating of SERPS.

State Pension (Age Addition)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the cost of raising the addition to the basic state pension for those aged 80 years or over from 25p to *(a)* £3 per week and *(b)* £5 per week, assuming no change in the thresholds for means-tested benefits. [9320]

Mr. Denham: We believe that all pensioners should share fairly in rising national prosperity and are committed to examine the means of delivering more help to the poorest pensioners—many of whom are over 80. We will retain the basic state pension as the foundation of pension provision, increasing it at least in line with prices.

The estimated net cost of increasing the 25p age addition paid to those pensioners aged 80 years and over is £200 million and £350 million a year respectively.

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest £10 million.

Source:

Gross costs provided by Government Actuary's Department. Net costs taking account of income related benefit offsets have been calculated by the Department of Social Security Analytical Services Division.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of the extra 25p to pensioners over the age of 80 years; what was the cost of its administration in each year since 1992; and what estimate she has made of the cost of each in each of the next five financial years. [11072]

Mr. Denham: We have announced a wide-ranging review of all aspects of pensions. Our long-term objective is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to build up an adequate pension to guarantee security in retirement.

We aim to build a society in which there is a wide consensus on the future for pensions, both now and tomorrow, and to provide dignity in retirement for the whole nation.

The 25p age addition is paid automatically to all those in receipt of a state retirement pension when they reach age 80; administration costs are therefore minimal.

The cost of the age addition paid to pensioners over 80 since 1992 and for the next five years is given in the table.

Year	*Estimated expenditure on age addition £ million*
1992–93	29
1993–94	30
1994–95	31
1995–96	31
1996–97	32
1997–98	32
1998–99	31
1999–00	31
2000–01	32
2001–02	33

1. Estimates have been prepared by the Government Actuary's Department. Recipients of retirement pension, non-contributory retirement pension and industrial industries death benefit are included. Estimates for past years are based on the actual numbers over 80 on each benefit in question.

2. Estimates are in cash prices and rounded to the nearest £1 million. They relate to the gross cost of the addition, i.e. any income-related benefit effects of not paying the addition are not taken into account.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what percentage of employees in her private office are *(a)* of Asian origin and *(b)* of Afro-Caribbean origin. [9583]

Mr. Denham: The total percentage of staff working in the Department of Social Security private office who are of Asian or Afro-Caribbean origin is 13.3 per cent.

Our code of practice on ethnic origin surveys prevents our giving information which will identify individuals; I am therefore unable to provide a further breakdown.

Income Support

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many (i) single men, (ii) single women and (iii) married couples aged *(a)* 65 to 69, *(b)* 70 to 74, *(c)* 75 to 79 and *(d)* 80 years or over are failing to take up their entitlement to income support; and what amount is unclaimed by each group. [9819]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The position under the previous Administration when up to 1 million pensioners did not claim the income support to which they are entitled cannot be allowed to continue. We are commissioning research to find out whey they did not claim income support.

The number of benefit units with a head over 60 not claiming the income support to which they are entitled is estimated to be between 810,000 and 1,100,000. The total amount unclaimed is estimated to be between £590 million and £800 million.

Estimates for the age groups specified for 1994–95 are in the table.

Numbers not claiming their entitlement to income support (rounded to the nearest 10,000)

Age	*Single men*	*Single women*	*Couples*
65 to 69	10,000	70,000	30,000
70 to 74	20,000	150,000	40,000
75 to 79	20,000	170,000	40,000
80 and over	40,000	310,000	40,000

Amount of income support unclaimed (rounded to the nearest £10 million)

Age	*Single men*	*Single women*	*Couples*
65 to 69	Less than £10 million	£30 million	£40 million
70 to 74	Less than £10 million	£80 million	£30 million
75 to 79	Less than £10 million	£90 million	£30 million
80 and over	£30 million	£240 million	£40 million

1. It should be noted that the true figures may be higher or lower.

2. Estimation methods are described in "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up in 1994–95", a copy of which is in the Library.

3. The estimates for single men and for couples should be treated with particular caution as they are based on small samples.

4. All estimates relate to 1994–95.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the value of income support for a single pensioner aged 80 years or over as a percentage of average earnings; and what it will be in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2010, *(c)* 2020, *(d)* 2030 and *(e)* 2040, assuming real earnings growth of (i) 1.5 per cent., (ii) 2 per cent. and (iii) 2.5 per cent. and upratings in line with the retail prices index. [10115]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 24 July 1997]:* The policies of the previous Administration have created real poverty, growing inequality and widespread insecurity for pensioners. We believe that pensioners should share fairly in the increasing prosperity of the nation. Our review of pensions is looking at the central areas of pensions insecurity for elderly people. Pensions are of key importance to people's lives and it is vital to build a sustainable consensus on the way forward so that everyone can look forward to a secure and dignified retirement.

The information requested is in the table:

Single pensioner's (over 80) income support as a percentage of estimated average earnings

Date	*Real growth of average earnings per year*		
	1.5 per cent.	*2.0 per cent.*	*2.5 per cent.*
April 1997	20.6	20.6	20.6
April 2000	19.7	19.4	19.2
April 2010	17.0	15.9	15.0
April 2020	14.6	13.1	11.7
April 2030	12.6	10.7	9.1
April 2040	10.9	8.8	7.1

1. April 1997 data based on current benefit rates and the estimated gross weekly earnings of full-time employees from the Office for National Statistics.

2. The estimates for the future are based on the assumption of no growth in real terms in the value of income support for a pensioner over 80.

Incapacity Benefit

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently in receipt of incapacity benefit in the Bolton, West constituency. [9685]

Mr. Denham: The Government strongly believe that for people of working age, work is the best form of welfare. We are committed to giving opportunities to sick and disabled who have some capacity for work to do so. Some £200 million from the windfall levy has been set aside to fund this important programme of work and other measures.

The information is not available in the format requested.

As at 28 February 1997, the number of people in receipt of incapacity benefit in the Benefits Agency Bolton, West district was 13,760[1].

Notes:

1. This figure is based on the 5 per cent. sample of the pensions strategy computer system—INCAP—and does not include some clerical cases which are not held on the system.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 9 July, *Official Report,* column *519,* on incapacity benefit, if the sum of £200 million will cover measures unrelated to helping sick and disabled people enter the work force. [11166]

Mr. Denham: The Government are committed to increasing opportunities to work for people who are disabled or who have long-term health problems. Some £200 million from the windfall levy has been set aside to fund this important programme and other measures. The University for Industry will receive £5 million as start-up funding from the "other measures" element of the package. We are currently considering how to help most effectively those sick and disabled people who want training or work, and will make announcements in due course.

Asthma

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many registered days of certified incapacity due to sickness and invalidity caused by asthma there were in 1995; and what estimate she has made of the cost in terms of benefits. [10230]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) on 22 July, *Official Report,* columns *576-77.*

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made on the code of practice for the purposes of identifying fraudulent claims for benefit; and if she will make a statement. [10394]

Mr. Denham: We have, in consultation with other Government Departments been developing a draft departmental code of practice on datamatching. We have undertaken to publish this voluntary code of practice before using new sources of data allowed by the Fraud Act. In line with a previous commitment, we will be offering the draft code to the Data Protection Registrar for discussion before publishing a final code.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is her estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–00; and if she will make a statement. [11391]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The bulk of the Department of Social Security's information technology-related expenditure is accounted for by the Information Technology Services Agency which exists to provide IT services both to DSS and to certain other Government Departments. ITSA's total actual and estimated expenditure on the provision of such IT services is set out in the table.

£ million

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Current expenditure	354.126	359.251	356.463
Capital expenditure	81.370	24.100	23.384

Of this expenditure, the Department recovers the following sums mainly in respect of services provided to other Government Departments.

1995–96: £94.573 million

1996–97: £50.532 million

1997–98 (estimated): £35.192 million

Additional departmental IT expenditure, not accounted for by ITSA, is as follows:

£ million

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Current expenditure	8.655	6.846	7.751
Capital expenditure	18.529	19.612	18.084

Detailed spending plans for 1998–99 and 1999–00 have not yet been finalised.

Compensation Recovery Scheme

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made towards introducing regulations to reform the compensation recovery scheme. [11697]

Mr. Denham: We have announced today that the provisions of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997 will come into force on 6 October. We expect to lay the regulations made under the provisions of the Act in early September. Together, the Act and the regulations will

make compensators liable to repay benefits which have been paid as a result of an accident, injury or disease;

allow compensators to reduce compensation payments to take account of benefit recovery but only where the benefits and compensation meet the same need;

ensure that compensation paid for pain and suffering cannot be reduced; and

remove the current small payments limit of £2,500 at or below which benefit recovery does not apply.

Taxation

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will publish data in the manner of the tax benefit model tables for families whose head is a full-time employee with ranges of gross earnings from £50 to £310 in bands of £20 for *(a)* a lone parent owner occupier with one child under five years, assuming no child care costs, *(b)* lone parent owner occupier with one child under five years, assuming child care costs of £40 per week and *(c)* married couple owner occupier with two children aged under five years and aged five–10 years, assuming no child care costs. [8515]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 17 July 1997]:* The information has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many lone parents currently take advantage of the £60 per week disregard for child care costs in family credit, and of these how many she expects to take advantage of the £100 per week disregard introduced in the Budget. [10794]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* As at February 1997, the latest date for which information is available, there were 28,400 lone parents receiving help with child care costs in family credit. Of these, 2,000 lone parents with two or more children have child care costs of more than £60 per week.

The increase in the maximum allowed child care costs will help those already claiming with two or more children, some further lone parents already working will be drawn into entitlement, and will ensure that work pays for some lone parents not currently working. It is not possible to quantify these behavioural effects with any certainty.

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will raise the maximum family credit ceiling; and what is her estimate of the number of families which will benefit from the increase in the maximum allowed child care costs. [10918]

Mr. Bradley *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The maximum family credit ceiling is reviewed in the uprating order each year.

As at February 1997, the latest date for which information is available, there were approximately 2,200 families with two or more children with child care costs of more than £60 per week claiming family credit.

The increase in the maximum allowed child care costs will help those already claiming with two or more children, some further families already working will be drawn into entitlement, and will ensure that work pays for some families not currently working. It is not possible to quantify these behavioural effects with any certainty.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 30 July 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sentences

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average sentence for an offender aged over 18 years on a first conviction for a domestic burglary offence according to the most recent figures available; [10860]

(2) how many offenders aged over 18 years on a third conviction, or on a conviction after three or more previous convictions, for an offence of domestic burglary received a non-custodial sentence according to the most recent figures available; [10862]

(3) what is the average sentence for an offender aged over 18 years on a third conviction, or on a conviction after three or more previous convictions, for an offence of domestic burglary according to the most recent figures available. [10863]

Mr. Michael: The most recent available information comes from a sample of nearly 700 domestic burglars, aged 18 years or over, sentenced in March 1996. Of those with no previous convictions for domestic burglary, 46 per cent. received a non-custodial sentence. The average custodial sentence length for offenders on a first conviction for domestic burglary was 13.9 months. Of those who had at least two previous convictions for domestic burglary, 23 per cent. received a non-custodial sentence; this represents about 1,000 offenders in a full year. The average custodial sentence length for offenders on a third or greater conviction for domestic burglary was 16.8 months.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average sentence for an offender aged over 18 years on a first conviction for a class A drug trafficking offence according to the most recent figures available; [10861]

(2) what is the average sentence for an offender aged over 18 years on a third conviction, or on a conviction after three or more previous convictions, for a class A drug trafficking offence according to the most recent figures available. [10864]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is not routinely available because class of drug was not recorded for central sentencing statistics before 1993. A special study was carried out on repeat drug offenders sentenced in October to December 1994. For the offenders aged 18 or over in the study, the average custodial sentence length for those convicted of a third or subsequent class A drug trafficking offence was just over four years. First-time class A drug traffickers were not covered by the study.

Licensing Laws

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the licensing laws to bring opening hours for private clubs into line with those for public houses; and if he will make a statement. [11085]

Mr. George Howarth: Opening hours for registered members' clubs are in line with the general permitted hours for licensed premises. I have received no proposals relating to this particular area of licensing, and have no present plans for change.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) to what factors the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate attributed the weight loss in the rabbits found being stored at the Charing Cross and Westminster medical school; [11200]

(2) what recommendations for changes in procedure at Charing Cross and Westminster medical school have been made by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate; and what action has been taken; [11202]

(3) what action has been taken by his Department to reappraise the project of cat operations at the Institute of Neurology. [11206]

Mr. George Howarth: Between March and June 1996, the inspectorate carried out a full investigation into the allegations concerning the Charing Cross and Westminster medical school and the Institute of Neurology which were made in the National Anti-Vivisection Society's report "Access Denied". We do not have any plans to reopen this matter.

I understand that the inspectorate was satisfied that the weight loss in rabbits at the Charing Cross and Westminster medical school was a minor transient problem which can occur in any laboratory animal population. Although often considered to be stress related, no precipitating factor was found on this occasion. This was determined to have been an intercurrent problem not induced by any experimental protocol. The problem had been recognised and properly managed by the animal care staff.

At Charing Cross and Westminster medical school, the inspectorate identified irregularities in the application of approved methods for the humane killing of animals and deficiencies in middle management. The certificate of designation was revoked. A new certificate was issued when the establishment satisfied the Home Office that:

(a) a list would be maintained of persons competent to kill by schedule 1 methods, and the people listed would be retrained and reminded of their responsibilities under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986;

(b) suitable standard operating procedures were in place for schedule 1 killing;

(c) internal controls were in place to prevent the unauthorised killing of animals by other methods;

(d) changes were made to the day-to-day animal care arrangements to ensure greater communication and clearer lines of management and responsibility between the certificate holder, the director of the animal facility and all other staff involved in animal work.

The programme of work involving cats at the Institute of Neurology was reviewed by the Home Office: the science was found to be sound and the protocols were as refined as possible. The standard of performance of the procedures was reviewed and no breaches of licence authorities were found.

Two post-operative cats had been humanely killed to prevent further suffering. All work was suspended until the cause of the problems could be identified. The named veterinary surgeon had been consulted by the project licence holder at the time and the animals had been appropriately cared for. The causes of the unexpected level of suffering related to technical problems with the procedure. Subsequent changes to the vaccination policy, suggested by the named veterinary surgeon, resulted in no recurrence.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up a royal commission on the use of animals in experiments; and if he will make a statement. [11052]

Mr. Howarth: We do not consider that a royal commission on the use of animals in experiments is necessary at this time. In the Animal Procedures Committee, the Secretary of State already has an excellent source of independent expert advice on all aspects of the use of animals in scientific procedures. The committee is currently reviewing the operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and I expect to receive shortly a report setting out the committee's deliberations made, interim findings and initial recommendations.

Setting up a royal commission would divert resources from progressing the committee's review, from responding to its recommendations and from other planned Home Office initiatives.

The Government will work to ensure that the highest possible standards of animal welfare are implemented and that animals are used in scientific procedures only where this is fully justified. We will promote alternatives which replace animal use, which reduce the number of animals used and which refine procedures to minimise suffering.

We will pursue initiatives across Europe rather than risk exporting animal experiments to countries with less rigorous controls. The measures we take must also be sustainable and must not unnecessarily disadvantage United Kingdom research, medicine and industry or compromise public safety.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the alternatives available to the use of animals in experiments. [11053]

Mr. Howarth: The Government will promote alternatives which replace animal use, which reduce the number of animals used and which refine procedures to minimise suffering.

Section 5(5) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 requires that applicants for project licence give adequate consideration to the possibility of achieving the objectives of the programme of work using methods which do not use animals. In addition, when assessing licence applications, the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate ensures that protocols are refined to minimise the suffering to animals and the number of animals used.

The Home Office, through the Animal Procedures Committee, sponsors research into alternatives and industry itself has spent millions of pounds each year in the search for alternatives.

The types of replacement alternatives which are available include the use of human volunteers; computer simulation and mathematical modelling; improved storage, sharing and use of results from previous animal experiments to avoid unnecessary repetition; the use of non-protected animals, micro-organisms or plants; the use of non-living tissue; physical and chemical techniques; and in vitro studies.

Homosexuality

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the advice he has issued concerning the prosecution of private consensual homosexual acts involving males between the ages of 16 and 18 years. [11268]

Mr. Michael: My Department has issued no such advice. Prosecution policy is a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions, as the head of the Crown Prosecution Service, under the superintendence of the Attorney-General. The law provides restrictions on prosecutions for certain homosexual offences in England and Wales. Under section 8 of the Sexual Offences Act 1967, no proceedings can be instituted except by or with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions against any man for the offence of buggery, or gross indecency with, another man or for aiding, abetting, counselling, procuring or commanding its commission where either of the men were at the time of its commission under the age of 21.

The Crown Prosecution Service applies two tests before it institutes proceedings. First, it decides whether the evidence affords a realistic prospect of conviction; secondly, if that exists, it decides whether prosecution is in the public interest. Prosecution of those under 18 is not undertaken lightly and is more likely where there is an element of seduction or corruption, coercion or force. Each case would be carefully considered in the light of its own facts.

Members of the European Parliament

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the election of British Members of the European Parliament by proportional representation. [11488]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government recently announced their intention to introduce legislation this Session to provide for the 1999 elections to the European Parliament to be conducted using a proportionally based regional list system.

Amsterdam Treaty

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implications of chapter 14 of the Amsterdam treaty for the electoral systems in the United Kingdom. [11424]

Mr. George Howarth: We do not believe that chapter 14 of the provisional draft treaty of Amsterdam will have an impact on the electoral system in the United Kingdom.

We have recently announced our intention to change the electoral system for elections to the European Parliament to a proportionally based list system in time for the elections to be held in 1999.

National Lottery (Horserace Betting Levy)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the second report on the impact of the national lottery on the horserace betting levy. [12151]

Mr. George Howarth: An update on the impact of the national lottery on the horserace betting levy has been published today. This fulfils an undertaking made during the passage of the National Lottery Bill.

The paper, which has been prepared by the economics unit of the Home Office, examines continuing trends in off-course betting expenditure, on which the levy is closely dependent.

The statistical analysis suggests that, in 1996, betting expenditure off-course was about 10 per cent. below the level it would have reached in the absence of the national lottery. Horserace betting accounts for an estimated 70 per cent. of such expenditure, and therefore the levy yield is likely to have been similarly affected. This can be only an approximate figure, and the effect of the lottery may vary over time.

Crime (Sentences) Act 1997

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which provisions of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 will be implemented; and when. [12152]

Mr. Straw: I will implement most of the provisions of the Act, and to the same timetable as envisaged by the previous administration. The provisions of the Act which I will implement are set out, according to the target date of implementation.

Provisions to be implemented in 1997:

Automatic life sentence for a second conviction for a serious sexual or violent offence (section 2).

Mandatory minimum sentence of seven years for a third class A drug trafficking conviction (section 3).

Technical provisions and consequential changes arising from sections 2 and 3, including the extension of the automatic life sentence provisions to armed forces legislation (sections 1.5, 6, 7, and schedule 4 as they relate to sections 2 and 3).

New provisions for the release of those sentenced to detention during Her Majesty's pleasure (sections 28 to 33).

Increase in age limits from 21 to 25 for use of attendance centres for fine defaulters (section 36).

Abolition of consent requirements for certain community penalties (section 38 and related paragraphs of schedule 4).

Transfer of prisoners between jurisdictions (Section 41, schedule 1, and relevant paragraphs of schedules 4 and 5).

Repatriation of prisoners (section 42 and schedule 2).

Increase in maximum penalty for juveniles convicted of indecent assault on a female (section 44).

Naming juveniles in court proceedings (section 45).

Hospital and limitation directions for sentencing mentally disordered offenders, (section 46 and schedule 4, paragraph 12).

Power to specify hospital units for detention of mentally disordered offenders (sections 47, 49(2) and 49(4)).

Movement of conditionally discharged patients between jurisdictions in the United Kingdom (section 48 and schedule 3).

Extended maximum duration of interim hospital order (section 49(1)).

Transfer of prisoners to private psychiatric hospitals for treatment (section 49(3)).

Committals for sentence (section 51 and related paragraphs of schedule 4). This is linked to the plea before venue provision in the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 (section 49) which I propose to bring into force at the same time.

Increase in maximum penalty for indecency with a child (section 52).

Provisions to be piloted in 1998:

Community service or curfew order enforced by electronic monitoring for fine defaulters (section 35, and paragraph 10(2) of schedule 4).

Community service for persistent petty offenders (section 37).

Disqualification from driving as a penalty (section 39).

Disqualification from driving for fine defaulters (section 40).

Curfew order enforced by electronic monitoring for juveniles (section 43).

Other provisions for which no implementation date has yet been decided.

New arrangements for crediting time spent in custody on remand in calculation of sentence (sentence 9 and related paragraphs of schedules 4 and 5).

Disclosure of pre-sentence reports to the prosecution (section 50).

Application of mandatory minimum sentences for drug trafficking to service law (section 7 as it applies to section 3).

The previous Administration said that implementation of what became section 4 of the Act would depend on the Prison Service's capacity and available resources. They said, as an "example", that these provisions could be implemented in October 1999. Because the relevant convictions do not count until the section comes into operation, very few people would be subject to the provisions of section 4 until 2001. Against this background, and given current pressures on prison capacity and available resources, it would not be practical to implement section 4 for the present. I shall, however, keep the matter under review.

I have also decided not to implement the new early release arrangements set out in sections 8, 10 to 26 and related paragraphs of schedules 4 and 5. The same effect can be achieved in a far more clear and straightforward way by ensuring that judges and magistrates spell out in open court what the sentence they have imposed really means in practice. Sections 20 to 21, which deal with extended post-release supervision of violent and sexual offenders, are integrally linked with the other early release provisions and will not be implemented, but I will bring forward in the Crime and Disorder Bill alternative provisions which will provide the additional protection of the public which they were designed to achieve.

Criminal Justice System

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he proposes to take on the recommendations of the review of delay in the criminal justice system. [12153]

Mr. Straw: The review of delay in the criminal justice system was set up in October 1996 and its report was published on 27 February 1997. Interested parties were then invited to comment on the 33 recommendations in the report. My right hon. and learned Friends the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General and I have considered these recommendations, taking account of the responses received, and we have concluded that many of them have the potential substantially to reduce delay without impairing the quality of justice.

We have therefore decided to accept the following recommendations, making legislative provision, where necessary, in the Crime and Disorder Bill:

- those which are designed to enable straightforward guilty plea cases to be dealt with a day or two after charge, thus restoring the concept of summary justice;
- proposals for improving case management in magistrates courts by allowing certain powers to be exercised by a single justice and to be further delegated where appropriate to clerks to the Justices;
- the proposal that indictable-only cases should begin in the Crown court (subject to arrangements being agreed for dealing with remand hearings, submissions of no case to answer and related matters); and
- some recommendations for procedural changes in the Youth court.

The recommendations relating to legal aid, which complement many of those provisions, will be considered by my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor in the light of the pervious Government's proposed reforms and Sir Peter Middleton's review of legal aid which is now in progress.

We are not persuaded that the case for removing defendants' right of election has yet been made out, but since responses to the consultation exercise showed some substantial support for this proposal, we shall consider this question further, with a view to publishing a more detailed consultation paper in due course.

The Government's response to all the recommendations of the review of delay in the criminal justice system is set out in a document which has been placed in the Library.

Hong Kong Governor

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Governor of Hong Kong submitted a final report on the discharge of his functions under the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1990. [12154]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Governor submitted his last report to my right hon. Friend on 20 June. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Data Protection

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish his proposals for the implementation of the EC data protection directive 95/46/EC. [12155]

Mr. George Howarth: Copies of the paper setting out the Government's proposals for new data protection legislation will be placed in the Library tomorrow at 10 am.

Dublin Convention

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Dublin convention. [12156]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The convention determining the state responsible for examining applications for asylum lodged in one of the member states of the European Communities—the Dublin convention—will come into force on 1 September 1997. The convention, which was ratified by the United Kingdom in 1992, provides a mechanism for determining which member state should be responsible for deciding an asylum application made in the European Union.

Responsibility is determined according to a set of criteria. These include whether the applicant has a close family member recognised as a refugee in another member state; whether another member state has granted the person a residence permit or visa; the location of any illegal entry into the European Union; and the existence of a previous asylum application. The applicant can be transferred under the convention only if the receiving state agrees that it is responsible and if specific arrangements are made for the transfer. In many cases, the receiving state will not be the one from which the applicant embarked. There will be no change to the existing requirement that we must be satisfied that the applicant's life or liberty would not be threatened in the country concerned on account of his race, religion or any other factor; and that he would not be sent on to another state in breach of the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees.

The convention provides for the exchange of information on asylum applicants with other European Union states. This may include personal information such as fingerprints. The convention requires that such information may be used only for asylum purposes and may be communicated only to the authorities competent to make decisions on asylum cases. Information about the basis of an asylum claim itself may be exchanged only with the permission of the applicant.

Service Authorities

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make an announcement about the establishment and membership of the service authorities provided for under sections 1 and 47 of the Police Act 1997 to maintain the National Criminal Intelligence Service and National Crime Squad. [12157]

Mr. Straw: I have decided to appoint Sir John Wheeler to chair the service authorities. I am delighted that Sir John has accepted this appointment. I have no doubt that his skills and experience will prove invaluable to the service authorities in their task of maintaining the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad, both of which will substantially strengthen our ability to tackle organised and serious crime at national and international level. During his 18 years in

Parliament, Sir John chaired a number of committees and groups, including the all-party penal affairs group and the Home Affairs Select Committee.

In 1990, he was awarded a knighthood for service to the Select Committee. He has been a justice of the peace in London since 1978 and is an active member of the Order of Saint John.

The other independent members I propose to appoint are Paul Lever and Peter Holland. Paul Lever is chairman of BSM Group plc and of Ashworth hospital authority. He has held senior management positions in major public companies and has considerable experience in the fields of strategic and financial management. Peter Holland is an independent business consultant and is also chairman of Hertfordshire police authority. He has held senior management positions in the Reuters Group, with responsibility for human resource and financial management.

I am also appointing Maria Callaghan to represent me in my capacity as the police authority for the Metropolitan police district. Miss Callaghan is a member of the Metropolitan police committee, chairs the Calotels Hotel Group and has extensive experience of business management. She holds a bachelor of law degree and has practised as a commercial lawyer.

These are four of the appointments for core members, of which there are 10 in all, who serve on both service authorities. The six other core members are:

Member	*Position*	*Appointed by*
Councillor Stephen Murphy	Greater Manchester Police Authority (LAB)	Police authorities (East and West)
Councillor Bob James	West Midlands Police Authority (LAB)	Police authorities (East and West)
Councillor Peter Fallows	West Mercia Police Authority (CON)	Police authorities (East and West)
David Veness QPM	Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police	ACPO
David Phillips QPM	Chief Constable, Kent Constabulary	ACPO
John Warne	Director, Organised and International Crime Directorate, Home Office	Home Secretary

The NCIS Service Authority has a total of 19 members. The additional members are:

Member	*Position*	*Appointed by*
Cllr. Ron Fisher JP	South Yorkshire Police Authority (LAB)	Police authorities (E and W)
Cllr. Owen May	Devon and Cornwall Police Authority (Lib Dem)	Police authorities (E and W)
Cllr. Julia Sturrock	Taysie Joint Police Board	Police authorities (Scotland)
Pat Armstrong CBE	Police Authority for Northern Ireland	PANI
Ian Oliver QPM	Chief Constable, Grampian Police	ACPOS
Ronnie Flanagan OBE	Chief Constable, Royal Ulster Constabulary	Royal Ulster Constabulary
Dick Kellaway	Chief Investigation Officer, Her Majesty Customs and Excise	Commissioners for Customs and Excise
Duncan Macnivan	Head of Police, Fire and Emergencies Group, Scottish Office	Secretary of State, Scotland
John Steele CBE OBE TD DL	Senior Director, Northern Ireland	Secretary of State, Northern Ireland

The National Crime Squad Service Authority has a total of 17 members. The additional members are:

Member	*Position*	*Appointed by*
Cllr. Ken Walker	Cleveland Police Authority (LAB)	Police authorities (E and W)
Cllr. Barry Murray	South Wales Police Authority (LAB)	Police authorities (E and W)
Cllr. Neil Taggart	West Yorkshire Police Authority (LAB)	Police authorities (E and W)
Cllr. Sir. John Grugeon DL	Kent Police Authority (CON)	Police authorities (E and W)
Cllr. Elfyn Williams	North Wales Police Authority (Lib Dem)	Police authorities (E and W)
Cllr. Mrs. Angela Harris DL	North Yorkshire Police Authority (Lib Dem)	Police authorities (E and W)
David Wilmot QPM	Chief Constable, Greater Manchester Police	ACPO

The independent members were selected in line with Nolan principles following the procedures set out by Sir Len Peach in his guidance on public appointments. The police authority members for England and Wales were selected from among the local authority members of police authorities so as to ensure that, as far as practicable, the membership of the service authorities reflects the balance of parties across all local authority members of police authorities.

Private Security Industry

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that any company supplying security services to his Department should be a member of the self-regulating organisations in the private security industry. [10448]

Mr. Straw: Current policy on appraisal of suppliers—including those providing security services—is to include, as best practice, criteria covering membership of self-regulating organisations. We recommend that

> "proof of enrolment on a professional or trade register, or register of companies in the country in which the supplier is established"

is obtained. Such membership is not in itself mandatory for prospective suppliers of goods and services to the Home Department. It is one of a range of criteria on which a conclusion will be reached about the suppliers' ability to perform the proposed contract.

The planned introduction of statutory regulations for the private security industry, which I announced on 15 July 1997, will necessitate a review of our present guidance on supplier appraisal. This will follow a wide consultation exercise with the security industry over the next year.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10732]

Mr. Straw: The payment of salaries and wages to staff in the Home Office, its agencies and some non-departmental public bodies is made through the Home Office payroll, which is managed in-house. Payroll services are not provided to other Departments. Funds are disbursed through the payroll for tax, national insurance, voluntary deductions made by staff, attachment of earnings etc. Financial management information is provided to budget managers. The cost of the service in 1996–97 was £3.7 million. Chessington Computer Services Ltd., provide a standard payroll package on licence to the Home Office. A software bureau, SEMA Group, processes the payroll data.

No management systems were purchased during the year.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [11390]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Victim Support

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much financial support, at current prices, the Government have given to the voluntary organisation, Victim Support, in each year since 1979. [11353]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* In the following table, the annual Home Office grant to Victim Support has been revalued to 1997–98 prices using the gross domestic product deflator.

Financial year	*Grant £million*
1979–80	0.014
1980–81	0.023
1981–82	0.038
1982–83	0.031
1983–84	0.071
1984–85	0.110
1985–86	0.212
1986–87	0.466
1987–88	2.730
1988–89	3.977
1989–90	5.305
1990–91	5.948
1991–92	6.695
1992–93	8.227
1993–94	9.223
1994–95	10.866
1995–96	11.421
1996–97	12.003
1997–98	12.682

The previous Government froze the grant to Victim Support at £11.7 million and made it clear that no more money would be forthcoming. However, support for victims is a top priority for us and, in furtherance of that aim, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on Friday 13 June that the Home Office was increasing its grant to Victim Support by £1 million a year, taking it to £12.7 million.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money at current prices has been invested by the Government in closed circuit television in each year since it was introduced. [11351]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* Home Office funding for closed circuit television has been provided through three rounds of the CCTV challenge competition—held in 1994–95, 1996–97 and 1997–98. Some £5 million was awarded to local crime prevention partnerships in round 1; £17.1 million in round 2; and £15 million in round 3. The funds awarded in 1994–95 and 1996–97 are worth £5.4 million and £17.6 million, respectively, at current prices.

Awards made in round 1 of the competition have all been paid in full. Awards under rounds 2 and 3 are being paid on a basis of need as projects proceed towards implementation. Actual expenditure in 1996–97 was £9.2 million—£9.5 million at current prices.

Funding for CCTV is available through other programmes such as the single regeneration budget. However, expenditure on CCTV is not identified separately on such programmes.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of recorded crime in each police area in England and Wales in each year since 1992. [11163]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* Information by police force area on the levels of crime in terms of numbers and percentages since 1992 is given in the table.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police by police force area

England and Wales 1992–96

Police force area	*Number of offences* 1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	*Percentage change* 1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
Avon and Somerset	175,404	175,946	167,975	152,886	156,557	0	–5	–9	2
Bedfordshire	59,436	58,847	52,501	51,104	52,005	–1	–11	–3	2
Cambridgeshire	66,339	65,807	61,732	67,652	69,532	–1	–6	+10	3
Cheshire	79,491	80,156	74,926	73,202	66,214	+1	–7	–2	–10
Cleveland	84,312	78,279	81,732	79,719	78,608	–7	+4	–2	–1
Cumbria	45,336	43,744	42,492	41,230	39,739	–4	–3	–3	–4
Derbyshire	88,449	91,454	85,915	82,380	78,896	+3	–6	–4	–4
Devon and Cornwall	114,675	121,026	109,396	102,193	103,121	+6	–10	–7	1
Dorset	52,238	52,091	55,415	54,582	49,731	0	+6	–2	–9
Durham	67,315	67,180	65,029	57,817	51,849	0	–3	–11	–10
Essex	115,062	114,435	105,995	98,097	100,758	–1	–7	–7	3
Gloucestershire	60,601	60,985	60,371	55,448	53,675	+1	–1	–8	–3
Greater Manchester	395,195	364,858	338,110	327,994	327,976	–8	–7	–3	0
Hampshire	153,256	147,074	141,272	134,319	135,915	–4	–4	–5	1
Hertfordshire	59,129	56,868	54,887	55,891	54,441	–4	–3	+2	–3
Humberside	128,743	140,988	135,826	128,393	126,932	+10	–4	–5	–1
Kent	159,881	161,787	155,344	155,251	147,980	+1	–4	0	–5
Lancashire	132,138	134,581	127,300	124,921	122,487	+2	–5	–2	–2
Leicestershire	97,468	99,863	99,150	93,607	94,125	+2	–1	–6	1
Lincolnshire	49,306	52,664	47,767	48,015	47,077	+7	–9	+1	–2
London, City of	6,768	5,620	5,272	5,727	4,831	–17	–6	+9	–16
Merseyside	149,672	142,325	136,825	153,385	145,956	–5	–4	+12	–5
Metropolitan Police	942,876	910,209	853,478	817,082	841,784	–3	–6	–4	3
Norfolk	66,996	64,319	56,075	51,716	55,314	–4	–13	–8	7
Northamptonshire	59,550	59,850	57,607	56,524	57,378	+1	–4	–2	2
Northumbria	224,442	213,936	204,057	194,141	169,656	–5	–5	–5	–13
North Yorkshire	54,816	57,967	62,153	63,539	56,919	+6	+7	+2	–10
Nottinghamshire	164,417	158,960	152,592	151,371	141,307	–3	–4	–1	–7
South Yorkshire	137,336	157,229	157,089	154,293	151,577	+14	+0	–2	–2
Staffordshire	97,536	98,421	93,757	91,495	92,155	+1	–5	–2	1
Suffolk	44,721	43,138	39,393	38,233	37,094	–4	–9	–3	–3
Surrey	53,468	52,504	46,783	44,313	42,014	–2	–11	–5	–5
Sussex	119,364	111,876	107,105	110,300	118,086	–6	–4	+3	7
Thames Valley	197,799	200,356	186,268	178,702	172,194	+1	–7	–4	–4
Warwickshire	44,996	45,522	42,592	38,906	38,926	+1	–6	–9	0
West Mercia	79,175	82,832	83,949	80,013	82,254	+5	+1	–5	3
West Midlands	329,260	330,091	315,755	318,087	317,892	0	–4	+1	0
West Yorkshire	305,264	301,838	289,716	283,938	268,716	–1	–4	–2	–5
Wiltshire	42,229	41,611	38,147	36,428	35,911	–1	–8	–5	–1
England	5,304,459	5,247,237	4,991,748	4,852,894	4,787,582	–1	–5	–3	–1
Dyfed-Powys	28,539	24,743	21,602	19,419	19,072	–13	–13	–10	–2
Gwent	40,961	40,008	38,431	33,034	44,572	–2	–4	–14	35
North Wales	49,204	48,102	43,451	41,645	41,024	–2	–10	–4	–1
South Wales	168,554	166,165	157,748	153,249	141,578	–1	–5	–3	–8
Wales	287,258	279,018	261,232	247,347	246,246	–3	–6	–5	0
England and Wales	5,591,717	5,526,255	5,252,980	5,100,241	5,033,828	–1	–5	–3	–1

Alcohol-related Crime

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the estimated cost to the police of alcohol-related incidents and offences in the last year for which figures are available. [11372]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 29 July 1997]*: This information is not collected centrally. The cost to the police of responding to incidents and dealing with offences is a matter for individual chief constables.

Senior police officers have expressed concern about the level of drink-related incidents and the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) has recently announced that we will be bringing in a range of measures to tackle the particular problem of young people and alcohol, including a new offence of buying alcohol for unsupervised under 18-year-olds and clarification of the position on test purchases. The Government will also implement on 1 August the Confiscation of Alcohol Act 1997 which will give the police a discretionary power to confiscate alcohol, or what appears to be alcohol, from under-age drinkers in any public place, or any other place to which the young person had unlawfully gained access.

Neighbourhood Watch

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many neighbourhood watch schemes there were in each year since the schemes were introduced. [11352]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 29 July 1997]*: Neighbourhood watch schemes were first introduced in 1982. Statistics relating to the early years of their development were not collected systematically. Information is available only from 1991 onwards and is as follows:

	Number
January to December 1991	99,149
January to December 1992	115,678
January to December 1993	130,584
January to March 1994–95	143,002
April to March 1995–96	153,260
April to March 1996–97	161,397

Police (Wales)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were employed by each of the four Welsh police forces in each year since 1979. [11199]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The information is set out in the table:

Year	*Police force*			
As at March	*Dyfed-Powys*	*Gwent*	*North Wales*	*South Wales*
1979	910	965	1,268	2,936
1980	926	967	1,275	3,056
1981	932	972	1,293	3,065
1982	920	964	1,286	3,103
1983	927	963	1,296	3,091
1984	921	962	1,290	3,071
1985	910	964	1,271	3,073
1986	930	978	1,253	3,066
1987	932	973	1,286	3,100
1988	917	979	1,300	3,126
1989	931	996	1,327	3,102
1990	935	1,008	1,337	3,135
1991	935	999	1,349	3,137
1992	947	1,009	1,347	3,168
1993	967	1,004	1,360	3,176
1994	965	993	1,352	3,131
1995	976	997	1,366	3,014
1996	991	[1]1,044	1,378	[1]3,027
1997	1,005	[1]1,243	1,369	[1]2,976

[1] As a result of local government re-organisation in Wales on 1 April 1996, 150 police officers were transferred from the South Wales police to the Gwent constabulary.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Asian Initiative

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many and which countries are recipients of aid under the Asian initiative. [9952]

Clare Short: The initiative will work in high-priority countries in terms of reproductive health needs. The main recipients are expected to be Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam. Other countries may be included later.

Yemen

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on future levels of planned aid to Yemen. [11289]

Clare Short: The bulk of Britain's development assistance to Yemen is provided through contributions to the World bank and European Community. Our bilateral programme focuses on the Government of Yemen's priorities for economic recovery and includes support for the World bank's programme to regenerate Aden port. Projects funded under the British partnership scheme support local non-governmental organisations and small communities. We are currently reviewing our programme.

Sex Discrimination

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the countries which have not *(a)* signed and *(b)* ratified the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women; what steps her Department is taking to encourage them to do so; and if she will make a staement. [11490]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Unemployed Graduates

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of students who graduated in June 1996 were unemployed in June 1997; and if he will make a statement. [10517]

Dr. Howells: The latest data available for unemployment rates of new full-time first degree graduates in the UK are for the academic year 1994–95 which show that 9 per cent. of graduates with known destination were unemployed six months after graduation. Data on the first destinations of graduates for the academic year 1995–96 will be published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency at the end of this month.

Unemployment among newly qualified graduates has declined annually since 1992 and this decline has occurred in spite of the increased output of graduates from universities and colleges of higher education. The unemployment rate for graduates in the economically active labour force is, however, much lower than this and stood at 4.1 per cent. in 1996. Those with degrees enjoy employment rates significantly higher than those without.

Higher Education

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of general national vocational qualification students will be attending higher education institutes from September 1997; and if he will make a statement. [10485]

Dr. Howells: Available information on applicants and acceptances to HE courses through the Universities and Colleges Admission Service scheme shows that in 1996 there were 21,308 applicants who had taken either units of the advanced GNVQ or the full award and were applying to higher education institutions HEIs. Of these, 13,090—61.4 per cent.—gained HE places. This compares favourably with 1995, when 5,942 UCAS applicants—58.5 per cent.—gained places at HEIs out of a total of 10.151. A total of 168 HEIs have accepted advanced GNVQ applicants on to their courses, with 50 accepting more than 100 such applicants, including 26 with more than 200 and eight with more than 300 GNVQ entrants.

Student Debt

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will conduct a national investigation into debts owed to universities and other higher educational institutes by graduating students; and if he will make a statement. [10519]

Dr. Howells: We have no plans to conduct such an investigation. Money owed to individual institutions is a matter between them and the students concerned.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate his Department has made of levels of average student debt for 2000; and if he will make a statement. [10524]

Dr. Howells: A typical higher education student graduating in the year 2,000 having attended a three-year course away from home and outside London would have a total debt of some £4,600 at 1997 prices if he or she took out the maximum available student loan each year. This figure excludes any commercial or family debts, information on which is not collected centrally.

Students Loans

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of student loans from each year since the scheme's inception remain in *(a)* arrears and *(b)* total default at the latest available date; and in what proportion of cases in each year recovery action is being taken. [11473]

Dr. Howells: This is a matter for the Student Loans Company. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend with the information requested.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what arrangements he proposes to make in respect of expenditure related to the sale of student debt prior to Royal Assent being granted to the Education (Student Loans) Bill. [12219]

Dr. Howells: Parliamentary approval to this new service will be sought in a Supplementary Estimate for the Department of Education and Employment: Programmes and Central Services vote, class IX, vote 1. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £1 million will be met by repayable advances from the contingencies fund.

Student Fees

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the cost of providing free tuition for all part-time undergraduates *(a)* in higher education and *(b)* on approved further education courses. [11182]

Dr. Howells: We estimate that the annual cost of meeting the fees currently paid in respect of *(a)* all part-time undergraduates in higher education and *(b)* all students, including full-time students, in further education who currently pay fees would be approaching £300 million and some £200 million respectively. It is not possible to estimate the fee income from all part-time students in further education separately, though it is known to be well in excess of £100 million.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if medical students following courses of between four and six years will be required to make a contribution to their tuition fees throughout their university and hospital training. [11036]

Dr. Howells: Under the plans announced by my right hon. Friend in the statement that he made in the House on 23 July, full-time students in higher education would pay up to £1,000 per year depending on parental income. But, as my right hon. Friend also made clear, we shall be considering the need for appropriate measures, such as bursaries for students entering some health and social care professional courses, as well as teacher training courses, given the state's particular interest in securing a continued supply of qualified professionals in these areas. We have invited the views of representative bodies by the end of September.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to make discretionary degree course fees subject to parental means-testing. [10769]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend announced on 23 July the Government's proposals to require full-time undergraduates to make a contribution to tuition fees of up to £1,000, dependent on parental income. The implications of these proposals for students who are not currently eligible for mandatory awards are being considered and will be dealt with in a more detailed policy statement in the autumn.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of employees, in each payband, in the quangos for which his Department is responsible, are of *(a)* Asian origin and *(b)* Afro-Caribbean origin. [8962]

Dr. Howells: The numbers employed are too small to make percentages by payband meaningful in those executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by this Department and using civil service grades[1]. Overall, staff of Asian origin represent 3.6 per cent., while those of Afro-Caribbean origin represent 2.9 per cent., of the 1,570 staff. These staff are found across the grades as follows:

Grade and equivalent	*Number of staff of Asian origin*	*Number of Afro-Caribbean origin*
Senior civil service grades	1	0
G6 and equivalent	3	0
G7	1	0
SEO	4	3
HEO	10	2

Grade and equivalent	*Number of staff of Asian origin*	*Number of Afro-Caribbean origin*
EO	19	14
AO	9	27
AA	2	1

[1] Funding Agency for Schools, Education Assets Board, Higher Education Funding Council for England, Further Education Funding Council, Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority, Equal Opportunities Commission, Teachers' Training Agency, National Council for Educational Technology, Investors in People UK Ltd.

Comparable data are not available from the other NDPBs. The latest figures for Remploy Ltd.—11,300 people—are:

Per cent.

Grade group	*Afro-Caribbean black*	*Asian black*
Shop floor grades	1	2
Staff grades	1	1
Management grades	0	0
Interworkers	1	1
Whole company	1	2

Recent available figures for the Construction Industry Training Board, with 900 staff, and the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board, with 40 staff, show that 0.4 per cent. of staff were Asian and 0.5 per cent. Afro-Caribbean; 1.35 per cent. of the Student Loans Company, with 295 staff in Glasgow are of ethnic minority origin and occupy supervisory and managerial grades. Statistics are not currently available for the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, with 282 staff and the Centre for Information and Language Teaching with 22 staff.

Dance and Drama Students

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make it his policy to bring forward proposals in his forthcoming White Paper on higher education to reform the system of finance for students of dance and drama; and if he will make a statement. [10815]

Dr. Howells: The Government are sympathetic to the position of certain students of dance and drama. They note the recommendations which the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education has made in this area—in particular the need to review the supply of dancers and actors—and in the light of these will consider with interested parties what new arrangements might be put in place once the current interim bursary scheme expires. The Government's response to the committee's report will be published in the autumn.

School Standards

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many special schools in England have been identified by Office for Standards in Education as falling or in need of special measures in each of the last three years *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of all special schools; [10352]

(2) what percentage of schools in England excluding special schools have been identified by Ofsted as falling or in need of special measures in each of the last three years. [10353]

Mr. Byers: The figures requested are set out in the table.

Schools identified by OFSTED as requiring special measures during the academic year beginning	*Special schools*				*Other schools*			
	EBD	*Other*	*Percentage*	*Total*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Percentage*	*Total*
September 1994	2	3	0.4	5	32	20	0.24	52
September 1995	14	9	1.8	23	61	20	0.37	81
September 1996	12	16	2.3	28	117	26	0.65	143

Student Grants

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment by what means he will ensure that the removal of higher education maintenance grants will not restrict access for students from lower-income families. [11049]

Dr. Howells: The Government recognise that participation in higher education by students from poorer homes is closely related to educational achievement up to 18 years of age. The policies set out in our White Paper "Excellence in schools" should greatly improve educational opportunities for all children.

The current student support arrangements have not encouraged students from lower-income families to enter higher education. The Government are therefore proposing to replace the existing mixture of maintenance grants and student loans with new system of loans which will be repaid by graduates in work. The new system will be fair and progressive, as repayments will be related to graduates' incomes, which are on average significantly higher than those of non-graduates. Parents in lower income families will not be expected to contribute to the costs of their children's maintenance while they are studying.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of average earnings the standard student grant and loan currently represents; and if he will make it his policy that that proportion is maintained in future years. [11493]

Dr. Howells: The support available through maintenance grant and loan to full-time higher education students studying away from home and outside London in academic year 1996–97 represented 18 per cent. of the value of gross national average earnings as at April 1996.

Future levels of student support will be determined at the appropriate time, taking into account all relevant factors.

Employment Service

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what targets he has set the Employment Service for 1997–98; and what plans he has for reviewing these in the future. [12160]

Mr. Blunkett: I have today placed in the Library copies of the 1997–98 Employment Service annual performance agreement, which sets out the standards and targets I expect the Employment Service to achieve this year. The new agreement reflects our commitment to helping people, especially those who are at a disadvantage in the labour market, find employment, and stresses that the priority for Employment Service managers this year is to take the necessary steps to prepare for the introduction of the new deal in April next year.

The Employment Service will have a key role in implementing the new deal, and is at the heart of our efforts to help unemployed people, acting as a gateway to job vacancies and a wide range of initiatives tailored to address each individual's needs. The breadth of ES's current work is reflected in the targets I am announcing today—from placing 1.75 million unemployed people directly into jobs, to helping to ensure that JSA is paid quickly and accurately.

I am also announcing today a review of ES's targets, including a consultation exercise with those who work with the ES, to make sure that the targets fully reflect this government's commitment to creating a fair and efficient labour market, in which all have the chance to prosper.

Teachers' Pay

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement about teachers' pay in 1997–98. [12158]

Mr. Byers: I am today laying before Parliament a second Pay and Conditions Order bringing the provisions of the school teachers's pay and conditions document into force from 1 September 1997. Copies of this order are being sent to local education authorities and the teachers' and employers' organisations.

The school teachers' pay and conditions document 1997 and the Department's accompanying circular of guidance, "School Teachers' Pay and Conditions of Employment 1997", circular No. 9/97, were published on 18 July following detailed consultation with the teachers' and employers' associations and representatives of governors of voluntary and grant-maintained schools. The document sets out the statutory pay and conditions of employment for teachers in maintained schools in England and Wales.

Class Sizes (Selby)

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the *(a)* average and *(b)* maximum numbers of children in primary school classes in the parliamentary constituency of Selby. [9974]

Mr. Byers: The available information is shown in the tables. The information in table 2 puts into context the information on maximum class sizes in table 1.

The information derives from classes as taught during a single selected period on the census date in January. This can include some unusually large classes. Classes can include nursery as well as infant classes, classes engaged in activities such as physical educations, games, drama, music, singing, watching television or listening to a radio programme, and classes supported by one or more members of the non-teaching staff of the school. Class sizes can be affected by one or more of these factors.

Table 1: Average and maximum class size for classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in the Selby Parliamentary Constituency in January 1997
(Provisional estimates)

	Average class size	*Maximum class size*
Selby	27.4	38

Table 2: Numbers of classes and pupils by class size for classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in the Selby Parliamentary Constituency in January 1997
(Provisional estimates)

Sizes of class	*Number of classes*	*Number of pupils*
1–20	27	403
21–30	191	5,060
31–35	89	2,886
36–40	8	297
41 or more	0	0
Total	315	8,646

Airborne Stand-off Radar Programme

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the number of jobs which would be created within the United Kingdom through the Ministry of Defence ASTOR programme; and if he will make a statement; [10813]

(2) what is his estimate of the number of additional jobs which would be created through use of the bombardier global express platform in the ASTOR programme. [10814]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Ministry of Defence aims to place the contract for the ASTOR programme in the next year. Two contractors, Lockheed-Martin and Raytheon E-Systems, have completed the competitive project definition studies for the ASTOR programme and invitations. Final offers for the full development and production phase are currently being prepared, following which the companies' detailed industrial participation proposals will form part of the assessment in awarding the contract.

Therefore, at this stage of what is a sensitive competition, we cannot speculate about the number of jobs that may be created.

Bullying

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what plans he has to reduce the level of bullying in schools; and if he will make a statement; [11462]

(2) what plans he has to meet World Health Organisation representatives to discuss the *(a)* causes of, *(b)* effects of and *(c)* possible solutions to reduce the incidence of bullying in schools; and if he will make a statement. [11477]

Ms Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend has no plans to meet World Health Organisation representatives to discuss bullying in schools. We are, however, concerned that all schools treat the issue of bullying seriously and take steps to combat it promptly and firmly whenever and wherever it occurs. To that end, our White Paper, "Excellence in Schools" has reminded schools that effective strategies to deal with bullying, developed and implemented by the whole school community including pupils, should form a central part of schools' behaviour policies.

We are currently looking at what further action we might take to help schools tackle bullying and reduce its incidence. This will include taking more active steps to spread information on good practice in combating the problem.

Encouragement of Enterprise

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to encourage enterprise among those who have been made redundant or taken early retirement. [9727]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I believe that it is important to ensure that people receive the help they need to become self-employed.

The Department's expenditure review will set our future priorities for employment and training initiatives to complement the new deal, including the encouragement of enterprise.

Currently training for work provides support for self-employment. This is part of a wide range of provision to help jobseekers return to work, including those made redundant or who have taken early retirement.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *443*, if he will list the elected members of local authorities who have places on the boards of TECs. [6301]

Dr. Howells *[pursuant to his reply, 7 July 1997, c. 342]:* In the list of elected members of local authorities, Mr. Alan Parker's name was included by error as an elected member of the board of West London TEC.

As director of education, Mr. Parker is an official of the London borough of Ealing.

Office for Standards in Education

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what changes he has agreed with the Office for Standards in Education to its inspection procedures. [12163]

Mr. Blunkett: As foreshadowed in the White Paper "Excellence in Schools", the chief inspector has agreed to implement a programme of changes arising out of Ofsted's analysis of information collected about contracting, the process of inspection and reports, with a view to securing possible further improvements in consistency, quality and value for money. Ofsted plans to introduce in the year beginning September 1997:

a quality standard for contractors which each will have to satisfy in order to gain inspection contracts. This will place considerable requirements on contractors and, where these are not met, Ofsted may cease business with them or reduce their level of activity until satisfied that they have improved. This action will be central to Ofsted's drive to improve the overall quality of inspections;

contracting arrangements which further reduce bureaucratic procedures and paperwork. These arrangements will also reduce the period of notice to schools of inspection and mean that all schools know the exact date between one and one-and-a-half terms in advance;

a requirement that team inspectors may inspect subjects or aspects only where they have the relevant expertise and training. Ofsted will organise approved training and accredit inspectors. They will have a register of team members and, with new legislation, the power to remove them from this register if they prove to be incompetent;

a requirement that the names of team members and the subjects and aspects inspected in a school are included in the published reports. This will increase their accountability and enable Ofsted to identify weak ones;

a requirement that inspectors should give oral feed-back to all teachers;

a limit on the proportion of any one day that a teacher can be observed by an inspector. The upper limit will be 75 per cent. of the day with 50 per cent. as the norm. This should reduce the pressure on teachers in small primary schools particularly;

a requirement that head teachers receive a profile for each teacher of the quality of teaching observed by inspectors. Each teacher will receive the data on their own teaching. This essential management of information should aid schools in identifying very good teachers, those needing further support and those whose competence is seriously in doubt;

a requirement that the second inspection comments on progress made by the school since the previous inspection. Much of the information will come from the school and its own review systems;

further guidance on judging standards by providing benchmark descriptors of what is expected of work judged "excellent" through to "very poor", for all subjects;

annual data summaries for each school, including aggregate inspection data from the previous inspection. Copies of all the summaries will be sent to LEAs along with a summary of data for all the LEA's schools;

an external person to review handling of complaints about inspection where the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of the complaint.

In addition, the chief inspector has agreed to review Ofsted's contracting procedures with the involvement of an external party.

I believe that this substantive set of actions will further improve inspection. The chief inspector has assured me that he will continue to review the evidence and make further improvements where these are called for.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Drug Abuse

Ms Southworth: To ask the President of the Council what progress the Government have made since 2 May in combating drug abuse and related problems. [11835]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I have been working with a wide range of ministerial colleagues to ensure a collective and effective response to a major social problem. Specific initiatives under way across Government include funding 79 local anti-drugs projects under the £2 million drugs challenge fund in England, and related developments in Scotland and Wales; publication of an independent evaluation of drug action teams, which points the way forward for local action against drugs; reversing potential plans for reductions in frontline Customs staff; reinforcing, in the context of the single regeneration budget and elsewhere, the links between tackling drugs and regeneration; planning for the Government's legislative commitment to a drug testing and treatment order; and a cross-departmental review to assess the resources available for action against drugs.

In addition, the Government are honouring their manifesto commitment to appoint an anti-drugs supremo to co-ordinate our battle against drugs. The special expert adviser post of UK anti-drugs co-ordinator, also known as the "Drug Czar", is being advertised tomorrow on a three year full-time fixed-term contract. We are looking for someone who can bring visible leadership and drive to the fight against drugs, working in partnership with all relevant agencies, communities and individuals. The post-holder will urgently review the overall direction of Government action, and submit proposals for a new strategy for England, while ensuring strategic coherence to the work in the rest of the UK and internationally. She or he will work directly to me as chair of the Cabinet sub-Committee on drugs misuse, and have access to the Prime Minister. We plan to make an appointment in the autumn, following an open selection process which ensures that the best possible candidates make themselves available for a vitally important job.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 30 July. [10316]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with colleagues and others and later today I shall host a reception at No.10 Downing street.

Intelligence and Security Committee

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Prime Minister if a decision has been made on the composition of the Intelligence and Security Committee. [12093]

The Prime Minister: Following consultation with the Leader of the Opposition and in accordance with section 10 of the Intelligence Services Act (1994) I have appointed the Intelligence and Security Committee as follows:

The Right Hon. Tom King CH, MP (Chairman)

Lady Ramsay of Cartvale

The Right Hon. Alan Beith, MP

Mr. Kevin Barron, MP

Ms Yvette cooper, MP

Mr. Barry Jones, MP

Mr. Michael Mates, MP

Mr. Allan Rogers, MP

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Groups and Committees

Mr. Forth: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if a list of the parliamentary groups and committees established in compliance with the relevant rules of the House will be placed in the Library. [11415]

Mrs. Roe: A new register of all-party and parliamentary groups is currently being compiled; it will be available shortly in the Library for inspection by hon. Members.

Mr. Forth: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what measures are being implemented to ensure compliance with the rules for the establishment, designation and operation of parliamentary groups and committees. [11414]

Mrs. Roe: The Administration Committee takes the view that the internal arrangements of all-party and parliamentary groups are matters for the groups themselves, provided they are not contrary to the regulations approved by the House on 20 March 1997.

In order to be formally registered, an all-party or parliamentary group has to give a written understanding that the group will abide by the regulations approved by the House. If any hon. Member believes that a group is in breach of these regulations, I would expect him or her to draw the matter to my attention.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Nolan Committee Records

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for what reason files relating to the work of the Nolan committee at the Public Record Office are currently closed; and if he will release these files into the public domain. [10407]

Mr. Hoon: Two classes of records of the Committee on Standards in Public Life have been transferred to the Public Record Office.

The first class—Public Record Office reference JN 2—consists of copies of written evidence submitted to the Committee, and is open to inspection, although evidence which concerned individual cases, or which has been found to be potentially defamatory, has been excluded.

As part of a pilot project to test the feasibility of archiving and making publicly available electronic records, a second class—JN 3—has been transferred to the Public Record Office in electronic form. Those of the records already in the public domain, in particular transcripts of public hearings, have been available in the Public Record Office since 9 May 1997. The other records transferred, including the minutes and papers of the committee, are currently subject to the 30-year rule under the normal provisions of the Public Records Acts. Access to closed records is in the first instance a matter for the Department concerned, in this case the committee.

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Experience

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what is the budget for the millennium dome project, broken down by *(a)* category of expenditure and *(b)* source of revenue. [6129]

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what sums he estimates will be required from business for the millennium experience exhibition; and what assessment he has made of the effects on other millennium exhibition activities of businesses supporting the millennium experience. [6478]

Mr. Mandelson *[holding answer 3 July 1997]:* Allowing for inflation and contingencies, the overall cash budget of the new millennium experience at Greenwich and associated national programme will be £758 million. Detailed breakdown of expenditure is subject to contractual negotiation and will be published in the accounts of the New Millennium Experience Co. Ltd. at the appropriate time. Budgeted revenue for the millennium experience will come from £175 million private sector sponsorship and commercial revenue—International Management Group's contract sets a target for sponsorship of £150 million—£168 million is expected from visitor revenue including ticketing and merchandising, and £15 million from the disposal of assets. The original grant of £200 million lottery money from the Millennium Commission will be supplemented as necessary by a further grant from the commission of up to £250 million (gross); £200 million (net).

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Identity Card

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs from what budget the funds for the development of a European citizen's identity card for public distribution at the European Parliament were allocated. [9643]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This information is not readily available. I shall write to the hon. Member once further inquiries have been made.

UK-US Space Project

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations between the United Kingdom and the United States preceded the launch by NASA of Cassini. [11050]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Cassini is a joint NASA–European Space Agency project due for launch in October 1997. Most discussion takes place between these agencies. The UK, within ESA, has been fully involved in preparations for these discussions.

Gibraltar

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Gibraltar. [10810]

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to visit Gibraltar. [11478]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no plans at present to visit Gibraltar. I am looking forward to my visit in September.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Spanish Government seeking the removal of the restrictions on military and civilian aircraft flying into Gibraltar. [10811]

Mr. Henderson: We have already made representations to the Spanish Government about the removal of restrictions on military and civil aircraft and we will continue to do so.

British Citizens Working Overseas

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the responsibilities of the British embassy and consulate towards British citizens and their families working abroad on permanent or semi-permanent assignments; what priority *(a)* these individuals and *(b)* British tourists travelling abroad receive; and if he will make a statement. [11096]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: This Department's consular services offer world-wide protection 24 hours a day seven days a week to all British nationals abroad. The level of help provided and the priority attached to it is judged on a case by case basis depending on the needs of the individual.

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy on the protection and support of British citizens working overseas for foreign-based companies. [11207]

Mr. Lloyd: The protection of British nationals abroad is a front-line responsibility for this Department. Consular staff provide protection 24 hours a day, seven days a week worldwide to all British nationals who need it, irrespective of whether they are working overseas or travelling as tourists.

Korean Peninsula

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding the four-party talks on peace in the Korean peninsula scheduled to begin in Geneva on 5 August. [11296]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We welcome the plans for a preparatory four-party meeting in Geneva and hope it will quickly lead to full four-party talks about peace in the peninsula.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for the latest year for which the information is available the individuals from the Republic of Korea who have had visits to the United Kingdom sponsored by his Department stating in each case whether the airfare or costs in the United Kingdom were met from public funds. [11361]

Mr. Lloyd: The following Korean visitors were sponsored by this Department during the financial year 1996–97.

Air fare and costs in UK met from public funds:

Dr. Shin Jeong-Shik, President, Korea Economics Institute.

Mr. Heon-Seok Lee, Assistant Minister for Construction Policy.

Mr. Kim Keun, Director, International Affairs the Hankyoreh Shinmun.

Costs in UK met from public funds:

Mr. Kim Young-Soo, Foreign Editor, Korean Broadcasting System.

Professor Shin Hee-Suk, Director General, Institute of Foreign Affairs.

Professor Yong-Tae Kang, President, Korea Technology Society of Water and Waste.

Mrs. Jeon Jae-Hee, Mayoress of Kwangmyung City.

Mr. Park Hae-Hyun, Cultural Reporter, the Chosun Ilbo.

Mr. Kim Kang-Chung, Managing Director and Chief Editor, Munwha Broadcasting Corporation.

Mr. Kim Byuk-Soo, Editorial Director, Seoul Broadcasting System.

Some incidental costs in UK met from public funds:

Mr. Lee Soo-Mok, City Administration Manager, Kwangmyung City.

Mr. Park Tae-Soo, Information Officer, Kwangmyung City.

Dr. Kang Moon-Soo, Senior Fellow, Korea Development Institute.

Dr. Lim Suhng Bin, Senior Research Fellow, Korea Research Institute for Local Administration.

Mr. Geum Chang-Ho, Researcher, Korea Research Institute for Local Administration.

Mr. O. Eui-Dong, Director, Planning Bureau, Pusan City.

Mr. Park Sung-Il, Assistant Director, Planning Bureau, Taegu City.

Mr. Lee Eung-Gil, Assistant Director, Planning Bureau, Inchon City.

Mr. Lee Kyu-Shik, Special Advisor, Inchon City Council.

Mr. No Jae-Sook, Director, Planning Bureau, Kwangjoo City.

Mr. Kim Chung, Special Advisor, Kwangjoo City Council.

Mr. Lee Kee-Ha, Director, Planning Bureau, Daejun City.

Mr. Kim In-Kyu, Director, Planning Bureau, Kyonggi Province.

Mr. Park Won-Il, Special Advisor, Kyonggi Provincial Council.

Mr. Hong Won-Pyo, Assistant Director, Planning Bureau, Kangwon Province.

Mr. Kim Nam-Il, Director, Local Bureau, Kyungsangbuk Province.

Mr. Suh Jae-Kyu, Director, Planning Bureau, Kyungsangbuk Province.

Mr. Chun Soo-Sik, Director-General, Planning Bureau, Kyungsangnam Province.

Mr. Kim Soon-Ik, Special Advisor, Cheju Provincial Council.

Mr. Huh Dai-Choon, Special Advisor, Cheju Provincial Council.

Dr. Kwang-Ho Meng, Professor of Preventative Medicine, Catholic University Medical School.

Dr. Euichul Shin, Instructor, Catholic University Medical School.

Dr. Hong-Jun Cho, Assistant Professor, Woolsan University Medical School.

Dr. Yong-Jeon Shin, Instructor, Hanyang University Medical School.

Dr. Kidong Park, Medical Officer, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs.

Ms Ji-Hoon Yang, Director, Division of Public Health, Cheonam Province.

Ms Bon-Soon Koo, Assistant Director, Division of Public Health, Kyungsangbuk Province.

Mr. Man-Soo Kim, Director, Division of Public Health, Pusan City.

Mr. Cheul-Yong Jin, Division of Medicine and Pharmacy, Seoul City.

Dr. Hong-Jun Cho, Assistant Professor, Medical College, University of Ulsan.

Dr. Chay Pyung-Gil, Professor of Public Administration Yonsei University and member of Presidential Policy Planning Commission.

Dr. Lee Chong-Su, Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Yonsei University.

Representative Kim Ki-Soo, Representative in Kangwon Province, New Korea Party.

Mrs. Lee Sang-Ho, Ministry of Home Affairs.

Professor Park Chong-Kee, Professor of Economics, Inha University.

Mr. Son Sang-Ik, Researcher, Korea Institute for Industrial Economics and Trade.

Professor Keun-Hyun Lee, Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, Korean Advanced Institute of Science and Technology.

Dr. Lee Ki-Hwan, Lecturer, Korean Maritime University.

Dr. Kim Si-Soo, Associate Professor, Pukyong University.

Dr. Chung-Sook Moon, Professor, Department of Consumer Economics, Sookmyung Women's University.

Bosnia

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 23 July, *Official Report*, column *604*, on what day he wrote to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe; and what response he has received. [11146]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We wrote on 18 July. The OSCE replied on 28 July that registration applications could not be lodged during the appeals period. Polling day arrangements for the housebound remained under consideration. But the OSCE lacked the resources required to enable the housebound to vote at home under international supervision.

Regional or Minority Languages Charter

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Government plan to sign the EU charter for regional or minority languages. [11294]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on 28 July, *Official Report*, columns *30–31*.

BBC World Service

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the effect on services of the 1996 review of the BBC World Service. [11104]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The joint FCO-BBC World Service working group will reconvene in the autumn to determine whether the measures it agreed last year to ensure that the continued protection of World Service interests and the maintenance of its special character, style and ethos are functioning satisfactorily. Meanwhile we are monitoring the situation closely.

Indonesia

Mr. Vaz: To ask the secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Indonesia. [11293]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We look forward to pursuing a substantive and broad-based relationship with Indonesia, which reflects the breadth of our bilateral, regional and global interests, and addresses issues of mutual concern, including human rights.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to refuse all export licences for arms sales to Indonesia. [11312]

Mr. Lloyd: We have no plans to introduce a general arms embargo on Indonesia.

China

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to visit the People's Republic of China. [11295]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: When they met in Hong Kong, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Qian Qichen, invited my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to visit China. My right hon. Friend accepted the invitation and hopes to visit soon.

Hong Kong

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to publish the first of the reports to Parliament on Hong Kong and the implementation of the Joint Declaration. [11979]

Mr. Fatchett: The first such report, covering the period January to June 1997, was published today and a copy has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The report includes a foreword written by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

I commend the report to the House.

Overseas Posts (Business Men)

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about increasing the number of business men on short-term attachments at posts overseas. [11980]

Mr. Robin Cook: We made a commitment in our business manifesto to improve the focus of our efforts to back British business selling abroad, to enhance the co-ordination of government trade and investment promotion, and to promote business secondments with this Department.

I am pleased to announce that we have secured a commitment from a number of leading companies to loan members of their staff to this Department to work on specific promotions or projects overseas for periods of a few months. These people will provide valuable expertise to support and promote the activities of the commercial sections of our overseas posts. Each attachment will have a specific focus, such as privatisation projects, inward investment promotion, management of commercial promotions, marketing of UK financial services, or identifying market opportunities in specific sectors.

I welcome the whole-hearted support for this initiative of the Confederation of British Industry. It has encouraged a number of members to participate from the outset, including British Airways, BOC, ICL, Wimpey, British Aerospace, BT, British Steel, British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., BUPA, Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation and Glaxo Wellcome. Other companies have expressed a strong interest and I am confident that more attachments will be arranged in the coming months.

This is a commitment to a rolling programme of attachments to strengthen our partnership with business. In the longer term, we hope that companies will be able to second suitable staff to serve as part of the established commercial teams in overseas posts, and in return provide opportunities for this Department's staff to hone their business skills by hosting secondments.

European Union

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what is the definition of discrimination due to marital status in the burden of proof directive; and if he will make a statement; [11487]

(2) to which categories of individuals article 3 of the burden of proof directive is directed; and what cost analysis of the directive has been undertaken; [11485]

(3) if he will make a statement on the Euro-Mediterranean free trade area proposed in the presidency conclusions at Amsterdam; [11481]

(4) if he will make a statement on the effect of Agenda 2000 on the future allocation of structural funds to the United Kingdom; [11489]

(5) what reforms of the directorates-general will follow the declaration of the Commission in chapter 16 of the Amsterdam treaty; what effect this will have on *(a)* foreign affairs representations and *(b)* the British Commissioners; and if he will make a statement; [11431]

(6) if the Schengen secretariat and proposed acquis will be subject to the protocol on subsidiarity and proportionality as outlined in the Amsterdam treaty; [11437]

(7) if he will make a statement on the progressive development of a common defence policy, as expressed in article J.7 of the treaty of Amsterdam; [11435]

(8) what special representatives he expects to be created under the provisions of the treaty of Amsterdam; [11442]

(9) in what circumstances the *(a)* qualified majority voting and *(b)* unanimity voting procedure would apply to measures under article 209a of the treaty of Amsterdam; and if he will make a statement; [11449]

(10) what is the maximum length of time a decision may be deferred on the legality of unilateral action undertaken under article 100a of the treaty of Amsterdam; [11453]

(11) if he will make a statement on the future of the European Coal and Steel Community reserves after 2002; [11483]

(12) for what reasons the additional fields of competence to the *(a)* Economic and Social Committee and *(b)* Committee of the Regions are granted by the treaty of Amsterdam; [11417]

(13) if he will make a statement on the declaration on implementing powers in chapter 18 of the treaty of Amsterdam; [11419]

(14) if he will make a statement on the change to the legal base of the Conference of European Affairs Committees, as established in chapter 19 of the Amsterdam treaty; [11421]

(15) if he will make a statement on the application of the deadlines established in article 189b of the treaty of Amsterdam; [11425]

(16) if he will make a statement on the procedural and secretarial implications of article 151 of the Amsterdam treaty; [11427]

(17) what effect article 158(2) of the Amsterdam treaty will have on the selection procedures for *(a)* the President of the Commission and *(b)* other Commissioners; and if he will make a statement; [11429]

(18) what measures will be undertaken by Her Majesty's Government to ensure the transposition of agreed legislation into national law; and what measures he plans to take in respect of the practice of gold-plating European legislation; [11479]

(19) what will be the consequences of article L of chapter 17 of the treaty of Amsterdam for European Court of Justice monitoring of employment conditions within the European Community institutions; what estimate he has made of their expenditure implications; and if he will make a statement; [11433]

(20) what scope for preferential use of codes of practice and voluntary conduct rather than legislation is *(a)* permitted and *(b)* expected as a consequence of chapter 9 of the treaty of Amsterdam; [11438]

(21) what will be the role of the Western European Union, under the treaty of Amsterdam, in elaborating EU decisions that have defence implications; [11460]

(22) what is the definition of participation in democratic transition processes used in the inter-institutional agreement in chapter 12 of the treaty of Amsterdam; [11444]

(23) if he will make a statement on the implications of paragraph 4 of article 129 of the Amsterdam treaty for domestic policy; [11447]

(24) what measures have been discussed at European Union level on extending the working time directive; what categories of workers are concerned; when the legislation will be implemented; and if he will make a statement; [11451]

(25) what effect the burden of proof directive will have on the basis of the common law concept of presumed innocence; and if he will make a statement; [11486]

(26) if he will make a statement on proposals to include arms export controls in the common foreign and security policy of the European Union; [11482]

(27) who the British representatives will be on the co-ordinating committee under article K. 8 of the Amsterdam treaty; [11405]

(28) if *(a)* committees of inquiry at the European Parliament and *(b)* petitions to Members of the European Parliament by aggrieved citizenry will be permitted in the area of title VI material under article K.13 of the Amsterdam treaty; [11406]

(29) what provisions of the Schengen acquis he plans to incorporate into British law in accordance with the protocol incorporating the Schengen acquis into the framework of the European Union in the Amsterdam treaty; what legislation will be required to implement this; and if he will make a statement; [11407]

(30) if he will supply a list of errata for the Amsterdam treaty text as deposited in the House; [11408]

(31) what estimate he has made of the cost of British participation at the Schengen round table established at Amsterdam; [11409]

(32) what is the significance of the reordering of the text in the amended article 2 of the treaty on European Communities according to the new Amsterdam treaty version; [11412]

(33) if Her Majesty's Government will include British representatives from *(a)* the Federation of Small Businesses, *(b)* the Institute of Directors and *(c)* other business groups and unrepresented trades unions as social partners in respect of the structural funds; and if he will make a statement; [11413]

(34) what effect article 163 of the Amsterdam treaty will have on the role of the President of the European commission; [11430]

(35) in which areas the Amsterdam treaty extends the competence of the European Court of Justice; and if he will make a statement; [11432]

(36) to what the reference to article 3b(2) in the protocol on subsidiarity and proportionality refers; [11434]

(37) if he will make a statement on the effect of the Amsterdam treaty on *(a)* OCCAR and *(b)* its Western European Union-based arms procurement equivalent; [11440]

(38) in what manner the high representative, as established at the treaty of Amsterdam, will be accountable to (i) the Council of Ministers, (ii) the European Parliament, (iii) national parliaments and (iv) other European Union institutions; [11443]

(39) what estimate he has made of the cost of implementing the objectives listed in article 129 of the Amsterdam treaty; [11446]

(40) which parts of the United Kingdom are classified as an island region under chapter 8 of the treaty of Amsterdam; [11450]

(41) if a directive that follows a Commission opinion on the legality of a unilateral ban imposed under article 100a of the treaty of Amsterdam would be agreed under qualified majority voting; [11454]

(42) if he will make a statement on the declaration on genetic engineering appended to the presidency conclusions at Amsterdam; [11484]

(43) what estimate he has made of the costs of implementing the institutional reforms of the treaty of Amsterdam connected with *(a)* the Committee of the Regions and *(b)* the Economic and Social Committee; [11418]

(44) what is his policy in respect of the geographic spread of the seats of the institutions of the European Union; and if he will make a statement; [11420]

(45) if he will make a statement on the implications of section V of the Amsterdam treaty for attempts by the United Kingdom to negotiate the repatriation of powers from the European Union; [11422]

(46) what will be the United Kingdom's proportion of total Members of the European Parliament under the treaty of Amsterdam at the entry of those countries for whom entrance to the EU is recommended in Agenda 2000; and if he will make a statement; [11426]

(47) how unclassified documents are to be released to the public in accordance with article 151 of the Amsterdam treaty; what will be the manner of storage of such documents that are withheld; when the latter documents will be released into the public domain; and which non-governmental and non-Commission bodies will have access to them; [11428]

(48) if he will list the circumstances in which a member state can ban products on non-trade grounds under article 100a of the treaty of Amsterdam; [11452]

(49) which social chapter legislation will be acquis by the time the United Kingdom is a voting member on the social chapter; [11480]

(50) what is the current legal basis on which European Union statistics are produced; [11436]

(51) what would be the powers of the European ombudsman in respect of the confidentiality of documents under article 191a of the Amsterdam treaty; [11439]

(52) when the common foreign and security policy will next be reviewed; [11441]

(53) what assessment he has made of the effect of the early warning unit declaration in the Amsterdam treaty on (i) the confidentiality of state secrets and (ii) the intelligence partnership between the United Kingdom and the United States; and if he will make a statement; [11445]

(54) if he will make a statement on the status of Welsh under the treaty of Amsterdam; [11448]

(55) if he will make a statement on the implications of article 6a of the Amsterdam treaty for United Kingdom law in respect of discrimination in the areas covered by the article; [11400]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10740]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is responsible for the following functions relating to payroll:

collating and processing payments including basic pay, overtime, National Insurance contributions, tax and other deductions;

arrangements for making payments.

Chessington Computer Centre is contracted to carry out these functions on our behalf and marks all payments and deductions through the SPIRE—standard payroll input and retrieval—payroll management system. The combined costs of the pay and pay assessment contract at present is £67.96 per payee per annum.

Sport (Redbridge)

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which elements of the national strategy for sport will be implemented in the London borough of Redbridge; and what plans he has to visit the area. [9514]

Mr. Banks: The strategy will be implemented throughout the country, including the London borough of Redbridge, and I hope to have an early opportunity to visit the area to see what is already going on and what opportunities there are for implementing the strategy.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is his estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [11388]

Mr. Tom Clarke *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The Department for Culture, Media and Sport's expenditure on computer-related work in 1995–96 was £1,126,000 current and £602,000 capital. In 1996–97, current expenditure was £1,138,000 and capital was £837,000. The budget for 1997–98 is for current expenditure of £1,261,000 and capital expenditure of £549,000. The information systems budget for future years is under review as part of the Department's current spending review process.

Sport

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the Government spent on sport in *(a)* 1978–79 and *(b)* 1996–97 in current prices. [10824]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* In 1978–79, central Government expenditure on sport to the Great Britain Sports Council was £15.2 million. In 1996–97, total central Government expenditure on sport was £51.61 million. Of this, £46.55 million was allocated to the Great Britain Sports Council and its successors from 1 January 1997, the UK and English Sports Councils.

Also in 1996–97, £264.78 million was awarded by the English Sports Council to 1,005 sports-related projects from the lottery sports fund.

Film Industry

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how much financial support *(a)* in grants, *(b)* as tax allowances and *(c)* as other benefits, at current prices, the Government gave to the United Kingdom film industry in each year since 1979; [10827]

(2) what was the level of Government-supported investment, at current prices, in the United Kingdom film industry in each year since 1979. [10828]

Mr. Tom Clarke *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The level of Government support for film in the UK for the years 1979–86 is not available except at disproportionate cost. For the years 1987 onwards, the support was as follows:

£ million

Year	*Amount*	*National Lottery*
1987–88	19.9	—
1988–89	21.1	—
1989–90	20.6	—
1990–91	20.4	—
1991–92	22.6	—
1992–93	24.37	—
1993–94	26.04	—
1994–95	27.6	—
1995–96	27.13	20.1
1996–97	[1]23.6	62.69
1997–98	[2]23.5	[3]7.89

Notes:

[1] Estimated outturn.

[2] Provision.

[3] To date.

Source:

BFI/Screen Finance/Screen Digest.

The level of Government support given as tax allowances and as other benefits is not available except at disproportionate cost.

Arts Expenditure

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much, in current prices, the Government spent on the arts in *(a)* 1978–79 and *(b)* 1996–97. [10826]

Mr. Fisher *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Central Government funding of the arts in Great Britain in 1978–79, provided through the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Crafts Council and the British Film Institute, amounted to £55.1 million. This is equivalent to £172.6 million in current prices, based on the latest assumptions of the gross domestic product deflators.

In 1996–97, central Government funding of the arts in Great Britain, provided through the Arts Council of England, of Scotland and of Wales; the Crafts Council; the British Film Institute and the national heritage arts sponsorship scheme, amounted to £252.3 million. Full details are given in the following table.

There are also other sources of arts funding generated through Government expenditure: either directly, such as through local authorities and the BBC or indirectly, such as through European spending programmes. However, complexities of definition and insufficient data make it difficult to provide reliable funding figures.

Direct central Government spend on the arts in 1978–79 and 1996–97

£ million

Arts organisation	*Grant-in-aid 1978–79*	*Grant-in-aid (1996–97 prices)*	*Arts organisation*	*Grant-in-aid 1996–97*	*Grant-in-aid (1996–97 prices)*
Arts Council of Great Britain	51.8	159.3	Arts Council[1]	227.4	227.4
Crafts Council	0.8	2.5	Crafts Council	3.25	3.25
British Film Institute	3.5	10.8	British Film Institute	16.5	16.5
			National Heritage Arts Sponsorship Scheme[2]	5.05	5.05
Total	56.1	172.5	Total	252.2	252.2

[1] Cumulative figure for the Arts Councils of England, Scotland and Wales as ACGB ceased to exist from 31 March 1994.

[2] National heritage arts sponsorship scheme introduced on 1 October 1984.

Arts Councils

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what level of Government funding, in the current prices, was provided for the Arts Councils in each year since 1978–79. [10830]

Mr. Fisher *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Details of central Government funding of the Arts Councils serving England, Scotland and Wales in each year since 1978–79, and at current prices based on the latest assumptions of the gross domestic product deflators, are given in the following table.

Arts Council Funding 1978–97 to 1996–97

£ Million

Year	*ACGB Grant-in-aid*	*ACGB Grant-in-aid (1996–97 prices)*
1978–79	51.8	159.3
1979–80	63.1	166.3
1980–81	71.0	158.1
1981–82	80.5	163.5
1982–83	91.3	173.1
1983–84	96.8	175.4
1984–85	101.9	175.8
1985–86	106.5	174.2
1986–87[1]	135.6	215.2
1987–88	139.3	209.9
1988–89	152.4	215.3
1989–90	155.5	205.3
1990–91	175.8	214.9
1991–92	194.2	223.2
1992–93	221.2	244.0
1993–94	225.6	241.8
1994–95[2]	223.3	235.8
1995–96	229.8	236.1
1996–97	227.4	227.4

[1] The increase in 1986–87 was mainly an injection of funding in compensation for the loss of GLC and metropolitan authority spending.

[2] The Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) ceased to exist on 31 March 1994. In order to give equivalent figures for 1994–95 and after, the table includes DCMS grant in aid to the Arts Council of England and the grant in aid to the Scottish and Welsh Arts Councils from their sponsoring departments.

SCOTLAND

Welfare to Work

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many young people to be covered by the welfare-to-work programme are estimated to require remedial literacy and numeracy assistance. [7929]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 21 July 1997]:* This information is not available. Under the new deal initiative, all young people aged between 18 and 24 and unemployed for six months or more will be given guidance interviews and sufficient provision of remedial assistance will be made available to those identified as having literacy and numeracy needs.

Holyroodhouse Palace

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons are *(a)* permanently employed and *(b)* employed on a seasonal and a temporary basis at Holyroodhouse palace; what is (i) the annual wages bill, (ii) the range of salaries and (iii) the average salary; and if he will make a statement. [9148]

Mr. Chisholm *[holding answer 23 July 1997]:* There are 22 permanent staff employed by the royal household and funded by Historic Scotland at the palace of Holyroodhouse and six paid for out of the Queen's Civil List.

For these staff:

(i) the total wages bill (including national insurance and pension costs) for the year 1996–97 was £513,130;

(ii) the current range of full-time salaries—excluding national insurance and pension costs—is £8,624 to £33,686;

(iii) the current average full-time salary—excluding national insurance and pension costs—is £13,009.

In addition, Royal Collection Enterprises Ltd.—a trading subsidiary of the Royal Collection Trust—employs 13 permanent staff in connection with the opening of the palace to the public and up to 13 temporary posts are created during the busy summer months.

Historic Scotland employ a number of industrial staff who work on various properties in the Edinburgh area, including the palace of Holyroodhouse. Approximate assessments of the costs associated with their palace duties show that:

(i) the relevant proportion of the total wages bill—including national insurance and pension costs—for the year 1996–97 was £333,643;

(ii) the current range of full-time salaries—excluding national insurance and pension costs—is: £8,500 to £16,182;

(iii) the current average full-time salary—excluding national insurance and pension costs—is £11,075.

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many days in each of the past 10 years there have been persons in residence in Holyroodhouse palace; if he will say who was resident; and if he will make a statement. [9150]

Mr. Chisholm *[holding answer 23 July 1997]:* The palace of Holyroodhouse has been occupied by members of the royal family and by the Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland for the following number of days in each year since 1988:

Year	*Number of days occupied*
1988	38
1989	28
1990	28
1991	28
1992	23
1993	32
1994	28
1995	29
1996	26
1997	[1]34

[1] Includes visits by members of the royal family planned for the remainder of 1997. In addition, staff of the royal household have been in residence from time to time in connection with their duties.

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the annual cost of the maintenance at Holyroodhouse palace in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [9149]

Mr. Chisholm *[holding answer 23 July 1997]:* The subject of the question relates to operational matters undertaken by Historic Scotland. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. Graeme Munro, to arrange for a reply to be sent.

Letter from Graeme Munro to Mr. Norman Godman, dated 30 July 1997:

In the absence of Graeme Munro, Historic Scotland's Chief Executive, on annual leave I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the maintenance costs of the Palace of Holyroodhouse.

The Secretary of State funds the cost of maintaining the fixed fabric of Holyroodhouse (as distinct from furniture, tapestries, paintings, etc.), together with security costs, the costs of utilities such as electricity, gas and telephones, and limited capital purchases such as equipment and office furniture. The Royal Household funds the costs of administering the Palace for Royal use, and the Royal Collection Trust undertakes the arrangements for public visiting.

The annual costs falling to the Secretary of State under these headings since 1990–91 are as follows:

	Programme expenditure	*Historic Scotland employee costs*	*Total £*
1990–91	860,833	288,636	1,149,469
1991–92	723,000	334,346	1,057,346
1992–93	696,600	338,530	1,035,130
1993–94	693,215	337,852	1,031,067
1994–95	897,700	345,124	1,242,824
1995–96	805,400	273,909	1,079,309
1996–97	743,700	288,126	1,031,826
1997–98 (estimate)	734,700	275,673	1,010,373

These figures include all Historic Scotland's expenditure directly related to the Palace apart from central professional and administration costs.

The provision of figures for the years preceding 1990–91 (prior to the formation of the Agency), or the separation of maintenance from other costs such as security and utility charges, could not be undertaken without disproportionate effort and cost.

I hope that this information is helpful.

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions Holyroodhouse palace has been the setting for public events in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [9151]

Mr. Chisholm *[holding answer 23 July 1997]:* Each year, approximately 14,000 people are invited to some 20 functions given at the palace by the Queen and by the Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on Her Majesty's behalf, including garden parties, dinners, receptions and investitures. The place is also used on occasions by other members of the royal family. In addition, the palace was used in December 1992 for the meeting of the European Council under the UK's presidency; in 1994 for a sate visit by the King of Norway; and during the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Edinburgh during October 1997, the Queen will receive Heads of State and other representatives of Commonwealth countries at the palace and will give a dinner and reception for those attending the conference.

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many tourists have visited Hollyroodhouse palace in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [9164]

Mr. Chisholm *[holding answer 23 July 1997]:* The numbr of visitors to the palace of Holyroodhouse in each of the last 10 years was as follows:

Year ended 31 March	*Number of visitors*
1988	316,593
1989	321,629
1990	297,730
1991	314,694
1992	278,346
1993	276,866
1994	299,722
1995	253,714
1996	260,294
1997	283,877

The palace was open on most days of each year, apart from during the visits of HM the Queen and the Lord High Commissioner and a few days of preparation before and after their visits.

Learning Support Teachers

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many learning support teachers expressed as a full-time equivalent have been provided by each education authority in the current year; and how many were provided over the previous four years by them or their predecessor authority. [9613]

Mr. Wilson: The information requested is not held centrally on a comparable basis for each education authority in Scotland at the present time. Information is collected annually as part of the school census about the provision of learning support. An analysis of this data shows that there has been a substantial variation recently from year to year and among education authorities. We strongly suspect that some of this variation is due to differences in the patterns of provision and interpretation of definitions of learning support, rather than differences in the total amount of learning support being provided in each authority. The methods used to collect this information are currently being improved. My Department will be considering with colleagues in education authorities, schools and HM inspectorate how to resolve this issue and collect and publish the information on a more comparable basis.

Pharmacists (Drug Offences)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will bring forward proposals to change the law to prevent a pharmacist, who has been disbarred following a professional hearing for offences involving drugs, from continuing his business. [9620]

Mr. Galbraith: I do not propose to change the existing legislation controlling the business of a registered retail pharmacy.

Persons who have been removed from the register of pharmaceutical chemists are not entitled to use the restricted title of "pharmacist" and cannot legally own a pharmacy business in their own name. They may retain an interest in the business by transferring ownership to a partnership or body corporate, but in either case the pharmacy must operate under the personal control of a registered pharmacist.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10735]

Mr. Dewar: My Department retains control of the majority of the functions relating to payroll for staff in the Scottish Office and related agencies. The departmental pay section is responsible for arrangements for collating and inputting of all data for staff salaries by means of the SPIRE—standard payroll input and retrieval—management system. The departmental pay section also directly manages the distribution of payslips and control prints, payover of moneys to third parties in respect of tax, national insurance and voluntary deductions and all accounting and reconciliation work. Processing, calculation and payment of salaries via the banks automatic clearing system is undertaken for the Department by Chessington Computer Services Ltd.

In 1996–97 the costs for these arrangements were £553,473 in respect of services provided by Chessington Computer Services Ltd. and £583,206 in respect of costs for staff employed in the departmental pay section.

Internet

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ensure the Scottish Office's web site on the Internet has adequate links to and from the web site of the Central Office of Information; and if he will make a statement. [11004]

Mr. Dewar: My Department's web site on the Internet and that of the Central Office of Information are available on the CCTA Government information service site, which gives access to all Government Departments' web sites. My Department's site will remain accessible through this service. It is planned to update the web site shortly, and links will be set up to the web sites of all other Government Departments, including the Central Office of Information. Other Departments will be invited to create reciprocal links.

EU Languages Charter

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what representations he has made to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office concerning the ratification by the United Kingdom of the Council of Europe's charter for regional and minority languages; [10376]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact of the ratification by the United Kingdom of the Council of Europe's charter for regional and minority languages on the *(a)* Gaelic and *(b)* Scots languages in Scotland. [10377]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The Government are examining what the implications of signing and ratifying the charter would be.

Civil Servants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time civil servants, on each payband, his Department currently employs. [11068]

Mr. Dewar: Pay and grading reviews are currently under way in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies other than the Scottish Prison Service, but have not been completed. Staffing figures, expressed as headcounts, are therefore shown on the basis of standard civil service grades in the table.

The Scottish Office and its Executive Agencies (excluding SPS) at 1 April 1997

Grade equivalent	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
Senior Civil Service	145	10
Grade 6	150	2
Grade 7	383	21
Senior Executive Officer	342	13
Higher Executive Officer	707	42
Executive Officer	852	42
Administrative Officer	924	124
Administrative Assistant	938	108
Industrial	305	—
Total	4,746	362

As a pay and grading review has taken place in the Scottish Prison Service, it is possible to provide a breakdown by pay band. The headcount information is set out in the table.

The Scottish Prison Service at 1 April 1997

Band	*Pay range*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
Senior Civil Service		6	—
I	£33,700–£52,100	6	—
H	£28,100–£43,400	30	—
G	£23,500–£35,750	58	—
F	£17,900–£30,650	182	114
E	£14,300–£25,550	563	—
D	£11,450–£21,450	2,257	4
C	£9,300–£16,350	1,182	12
B	£7,350–£11,450	190	10
A	£6,150–£9,600	38	2
Total		4,512	142

Forestry

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many forest shops and catering outlets there were, and what their net income was, in 1996–97 in each of the current Forest Enterprise regions; [10722]

(2) what targets have been set for the number of plans for the management of scheduled ancient monuments agreed with heritage agencies in each of the current Forest Enterprise regions in relation to the objective of conserving the cultural heritage in Forestry Commission forests specified in paragraph 11.9 of the Forest Enterprise corporate plan 1997 to 2000; [10724]

(3) how many countryside agencies and user groups will be consulted in each current Forest Enterprise region in connection with the review of recreation strategies and resource allocation mentioned in paragraph 9.24 of the

Forest Enterprise corporate plan 1997 to 2000; and what is the current resource allocation in each of those regions; [10721]

(4) how many plans for sites of special scientific interest will have to be *(a)* prepared, *(b)* maintained and *(c)* monitored for compliance in each of the current Forest Enterprise regions in order to achieve comprehensive implementation of the management plans referred to in paragraph 10.8 of the Forest Enterprise corporate plan 1997 to 2000; [10723]

(5) how many visits to Forestry Commission forests and woods were made during 1996–97 by educational institutions in each of the current Forest Enterprise regions; [10711]

(6) how many "What's On" events, as described in paragraph 12.20 of the Forest Enterprise corporate plan 1997 to 2000, were staged in 1996–97; and how many people attended those events, in each of the current Forest Enterprise regions; [10712]

(7) with which *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* statutory bodies and *(c)* non-governmental organisations is contact maintained for the purpose of liaison over forest design plans and other management plans, as described in chapter 12 of the Forest Enterprise corporate plan 1997 to 2000, in each of the current Forest Enterprise regions; [10713]

(8) what is the total combined mileage by the shortest practical road route from each Forest Enterprise forest district to that district's Forest Enterprise regional office under *(a)* the current five-region structure and *(b)* the proposed four-region structure; [10714]

(9) how many full-time equivalent jobs will be lost in Forest Enterprise regional offices in *(a)* Scotland, (b) Wales and *(c)* England under the Forest Enterprise proposal for reducing the number of regional offices; [10715]

(10) what assessment he has made of the effect on the Forest Enterprise standards of service of its proposal to reduce the number of its regional offices; how compliance to these standards has been measured in the past; and how it is planned to be measured in future; [10716]

(11) how many timber customers, as defined in paragraph 7.9 of the Forest Enterprise corporate plan 1997 to 2000, there were during 1996–97 in each of the current Forest Enterprise regions; [10717]

(12) in each of the current Forest Enterprise regions, how many *(a)* woods are leased to the Forestry Commission, *(b)* landlords own land leased to the commission and *(c)* landlords reserve powers over sporting rights on land leased to the commission. [10718]

(13) with how many sports representative bodies of the kinds referred to in paragraph 9.15 of the Forest Enterprise corporate plan 1997 to 2000 contacts are maintained; and how many permits or licences were issued for specialist sports and activities during 1996–97, in each of the current Forest Enterprise regions; [10719]

(14) how Forest Enterprise estimates the number of visits made by members of the public to Forestry Commission woods and forests for the purpose of measuring its performance in the terms described in paragraph 9.23 of the Forest Enterprise corporate plan 1997 to 2000; and how many such visits were made to Forestry Commission woods and forests in 1996–97 in each current Forest Enterprise region. [10720]

Mr. Chisholm *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The subjects of the questions relate to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its chief executive, Dr. Bob McIntosh, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Bob McIntosh to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 30 July 1997:

The Secretary of State for Scotland has asked me to reply to the various Questions you raised about the Forestry Commission.

I will answer each one by referring to the 5 digit reference which appears against each Question on the Order paper.

PQ No. 10711

Data on visits by educational institutions for 1996/97 is not held centrally or regionally. In accordance with the 1997–2000 Corporate Plan, para 12.20, educational visits will be a measure of Forest Enterprise performance in Promoting Public Understanding and Participation. The data will therefore be collated during 1997/98.

PQ No. 10712

Data on What's On Events for 1996/97 is not held centrally or regionally. In accordance with the 1997–2000 Corporate Plan, para 12.20, attendance at What's On Forest Events will be a measure of Forest Enterprise performance in Promoting Public Understanding and Participation. Data will therefore be collected during 1997/98.

PQ No. 10713

Forest Enterprise produces a wide variety of plans covering a range of topics at forest, regional and national levels. It would not be practicable to assemble a comprehensive list of all the organisations and individuals with whom we liaise in planning the management of Forestry Commission forests.

However I can give you a list of key contacts as follows:-

Home Grown Timber Advisory Committee to the Forestry Commissioners including the sub-committees on timber supply and the environment;

Wildlife and Countryside Link forum of the national conservation and recreation NGOs;

Biodiversity Challenge Groups of NGOs (RSPB, WWF, Friends of the Earth, Butterfly Conservation and Plant Life);

Representative groups of the home grown timber processing industry;

All local planning authorities;

Countryside Agencies—SNH, EN, CCW, CC;

Heritage Agencies—HS, EH, CADW;

Enterprise Companies;

Tourist Boards.

Local community groups are involved through local Forest District Environmental Panels. Ways of upgrading local community involvement are currently being developed in line with our Action Plan to improve performance in para 12.22 of the 1997–2000 Corporate Plan.

PQ No. 10714

I set out the combined mileage for Regional offices to Forest District offices on the basis of the 31 Forest Districts planned to be in operation after amalgamation from 1.4.98.

Current 5 Region Structure

	Combined mileage	*Average mileage*
North Scotland (Inverness)	652	72
South Scotland (Dumfries)	363	61
Wales (Aberystwyth)	242	48
North & East England (York)	641	107
South & West England (Bristol)	423	85

(b) 4 Region Structure with Bristol as the sole office for England No change in Scotland and Wales

	Combined mileage	*Average mileage*
England (Bristol)	1,762	160

PQ No. 10715

The number of full time equivalent jobs that will be lost in Forest Enterprise Regional offices as a result of the reduction in Regional offices, will be:

	Proposed reduction
Scotland (no reduction in offices)	Nil
Wales (no reduction in offices)	Nil
England	[1]40.0

[1] The reduction of 40 posts in England will be partly as a result of closure but mostly as a result of delegation of work to Forest Districts and centralisation of work to Head Office.

PQ No. 10716

The proposal to reduce the number of Regional offices from 5 to 4 will have no effect upon Forest Enterprise's ability to deliver the Standards of Service set out in the 1997–2000 Corporate Plan. Our services are delivered primarily through front-line staff in Forest Districts dealing directly with visitors, customers and suppliers.

Compliance with the Forest Enterprise standards of service is assessed through the Agency performance measure "Percentage Compliance with the Citizen's Charter Standards Statement". In 1996/97 systems were introduced and staff trained in order to operate this measure from 1997/98.

The measure comprises three parts:

> Percentage of day visitors using forest recreation facilities who consider the service to be good or very good.
>
> Percentage of customers using Forest Holidays cabins who consider the service to be good or very good.
>
> Percentage of payments to suppliers paid in accordance with the relevant terms of trading.

The 1997/98 Agency target is 90% comprising:

> 87.5% satisfaction for forest recreation day visitors
>
> 87.5% satisfaction for Forest Holiday users.
>
> 95% payments to suppliers on time in accordance with the relevant terms of trading

PQ No. 10717

The number of timber customers for each of our Regions, as defined in paragraph 7.9 of the Forest Enterprise Corporate Plan 1997–2000, during 1996/97 was as indicated below:

	1996/97
North Scotland	36
South Scotland	44
Wales	80
North & East England	75
South & West England	99
Total GB	275

1. The UK figure is 59 less than the total for the Regions. This reflects the fact that many merchants trade in more than one Region.

2. The figures do not include individuals who purchased small amounts of firewood.

PQ No. 10718

In answer to parts a. and b. of your question, I set out below the total area of land in each Forest Enterprise Region which is held on lease:

	Hectares
North Scotland	4,471.5
South Scotland	1,103.5
Wales	24,022.8
North & East England	40,770.0
South & West England	31,172.8
Total Great Britain	101,540.6

We do not hold the information centrally by individual wood. In respect of part c. there are general sporting reservations in our titles over the following areas of Forestry Commission land, by Region, to a third party as follows:

	Hectares
North Scotland	nil
South Scotland	nil
Wales	48,100
North & East England	23,600
South & West England	22,100
Total GB	93,800

PQ No. 10719

We maintain links with a wide range of sports representative bodies at national, regional and forest district level. There are no unique contacts at regional level.

The main national fora and contacts are:

> Wildlife and Countryside Link forum of countryside and recreation NGOs
>
> Countryside Recreation Network of statutory agencies
>
> Outdoor Pursuits Committee of the CCPR (Countryside Council For Physical Recreation)
>
> Sports Council
>
> RAC on motor car rallying
>
> Auto-Cycle Union on motorcycle enduro races
>
> British Orienteering Federation
>
> British Horse Society
>
> Ramblers Association
>
> Mountaineering Council for Scotland
>
> British Cycle Federation
>
> British Cyclecross Federation
>
> Scottish Cyclists Union
>
> Welsh Cyclists Union

There are also many contacts with local sports clubs at the Forest District level.

I regret we do not hold central records of permits issued for specialised sports.

PQ No. 10720

The performance measure referred to in para 9.23 of the 1997–2000 Corporate Plan is one of our Agency performance measures set out on Page 52. This records annual changes to the number of visitors to sample Forestry Commission forests.

For this measure, counters have been installed at visitor centres, car parks and forest drives in 86 forest locations covering a statistically representative sample of the most heavily visited areas across all Forest Districts. The objective is to measure trends in visitor numbers. 1997–98 will be the first year for measuring these trends.

In view of the size of the Forestry Commission estate, the number of accessible woods and public access points it is not practicable to physically count all visitors. No definitive records are therefore available for each Forest Enterprise region.

The Forestry Commission does however participate in the biennial household day visits survey carried out by Social and Planning Research (S & PR) for a consortium of Departments and Agencies. The most recent survey was conducted in 1996. As part of the survey several thousand adults were interviewed at home and asked about the destinations of leisure day trips. They were also asked if a wood or forest formed part of a trip and if so who was the perceived forest owner or manager. The responses were weighted to provide estimates of visits to Forestry Commission forests and woods. On this basis the 1996 S & PR survey estimated that 42 million day visits were made to Forestry Commission forests made up as follows:

England: 33 million

Scotland: 6 million

Wales: 3 million.

There is no S & PR data for individual Forest Enterprise Regions.

The 42 million figure is lower than the 50 million visits quoted for the whole Forestry Commission estate in para 9.4 of the 1997–2000 Corporate Plan since the latter also includes holiday visits not undertaken from the family home.

PQ No. 10721

Forest Enterprise has no specific list of stakeholders to be consulted on any review we may undertake over the next 3 years. The Corporate Plan sets out current policies, strategies and resouce allocations. This is circulated to over 1,000 people amongst public agencies, local authorities, NGOs, local communities and user groups. We are actively seeking comment from recipients on the broad thrust of strategies in the Corporate Plan. Focus groups will also be contacted to look at particular topics.

The planned net expenditure on Forest Recreation in 1997–98, by Region, is as follows:

	£ million
North Scotland	0.8
South Scotland	0.8
Wales	0.6
North & East England	1.0
South & West England	1.8

Actual net expenditure will depend upon visitor usage, trading conditions in income generating activities and the settling down of the new register of accounts in its first year of operation.

PQ No. 10722

Forest shops and catering facilities are provided at most Forest Enterprise Visitor Centres. These are operated in two ways; either by direct district management or by concessions. The 1996–97 data and results relate solely to FE managed forest shops and catering facilities which are usually run on an integrated set of accounts for each centre with shared buildings, services and management costs. The diversity in unit net income reflects the variety of visitor numbers to different forests and the range of facilities provided by Forest Enterprise

Region	*Number of forest shops/catering Complexes*	*Net income (£000)*
North Scotland	2	22
South Scotland	5	25
Wales	1	3
North & East England	6	64
South & West England	5	53

PQ No.10723

The percentage of SSSIs managed in accordance with plans endorsed by statutory conservation agencies is a Forest Enterprise Agency performance measure. A target of 100 per cent. has been set by the Forestry Commissioners as the proportion of SSSIs with endorsed plans by 31.3.98. This includes preparation, maintenance and monitoring.

The 1997–98 Agency target allocated by Region is as follows:

	Numbers
North Scotland	80
South Scotland	54
Wales	61
North & East England	90
South & West England	90

PQ No. 10724

The percentage of Scheduled Ancient Monuments managed in accordance with plans endorsed by statutory heritage agencies is a Forest Enterprise Agency Performance measure.

A target of 40 per cent., of 400 has been set by Forestry Commissioners as the number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments to have endorsed plans by 31.3.98. The aim is to ensure that all Scheduled Ancient Monuments on Forestry Commission land have endorsed plans by 31.3.2000. This 1997–98 Agency target has been allocated to Regions as follows:

	Percentage	*Number*
North Scotland	40	70
South Scotland	43	52
Wales	90	122
North & East England	30	58
South & West England	30	104

The varying rates in planned progress between Regions reflects the range of monuments, the variety of plan requirements and the need to pace work in harmony with heritage agency partners.

I should mention that all monuments with or without beneficial management plans will continue to be safeguarded from potentially damaging operations through check systems in Forest Districts before work commences in any forest area.

I hope this letter provides the answers you require.

I am sorry I cannot provide full answers for questions numbers 10711, 10712 and 10719 but you will understand we are putting in place mechanisms to collate this information during 1997/98 which will be available at the time of the annual report for that year.

Disabled People (Housing)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans his Department has *(a)* to extend part T planning regulations to residential dwellings and *(b)* to take other measures to increase the stock of accessible housing for disabled people. [10858]

Mr. Chisholm: The Scottish Office is considering proposals to extend the access requirements of part T of the technical standards for compliance with the Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations 1990 to cover new, converted or adapted dwellings, taking account of cost implications, and comments made during consultations on draft amendments in 1995.

Community care, including provision of new or converted buildings accessible to disabled people, and adaptations to existing dwellings, is a national housing priority.

A1

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the maximum and average yearly traffic flows on the A1 road at Pencraig Hill; and what proportion of that traffic consists of heavy goods vehicles. [11060]

Mr. Chisholm: The average annual daily flow for 1996 was 11,500 vehicles with 20 per cent., 2,300, comprising heavy goods vehicles. This equates in 1996 to a total of 4,197,500 vehicles of which 839,500 were heavy goods vehicles. The peak traffic flow in August was approximately 14,720 vehicles per day. This equates to a total of 456,320 vehicles in August.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his amendment to the Lothian region structure plan stating that dualling of the road to Dunbar is now in hand. [11063]

Mr. Chisholm: The modification to the Lothian region structure plan reflects the very considerable progress already made and the work under way in dualling the A1. As my hon. Friend is aware, preparatory work to dual the stage between Haddington and Dunbar will continue within the Scottish Office during the review of the trunk road programme.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of the new bridge at the end of the A1 dual carriageway at Haddington. [11064]

Mr. Chisholm: A total of £340,000.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what costs have been incurred on *(a)* preparing plans, *(b)* acquiring land and *(c)* other preliminary work for dualling the A1 road between Haddington and Dunbar. [11065]

Mr. Chisholm: As at 30 June 1997, the Scottish Office had incurred expenditure of £1.24 million on preparation work on dualling the section of the A1 between Haddington and Dunbar. No expenditure has been incurred to date by the Scottish Office on the acquisition of land or preliminary work.

Drug Addiction

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements are in place for monitoring the use and effectiveness of methadone as a heroin substitute. [11271]

Mr. Galbraith: Arrangements for the delivery of substitute prescribing programmes, including monitoring the use and effectiveness of services, are a matter for local consideration in the first instance. The use and effectiveness of substitute prescribing programmes are issues addressed in new national guidance on drug misuse services which has been prepared by my department, discussed with the Scottish Advisory Committee on Drug Misuse, and is now the subject of wide consultation.

An additional £1 million is being made available to health boards in this financial year to fund shared care arrangements for drug misusers, which will include monitoring and evaluation of projects.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the use of methadone as a heroin substitute for heroin addicts in Scotland. [11270]

Mr. Galbraith: Substitute prescribing, including the use of methadone as a heroin substitute, is a method of harm reduction which has an important part to play in tackling drug misuse in Scotland. It needs to form part of a comprehensive package of care tailored to the individual needs of the drug misuser, which includes counselling and support and supervision of the taking of the drug, to prevent leakage onto the illicit market.

My Department is issuing detailed guidance on good practice in substitute prescribing to all GPs and relevant health professionals in Scotland.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the expenditure on the provision of methadone to heroin addicts *(a)* by health board and *(b)* in total for each of the last 10 years in Scotland. [11272]

Mr. Galbraith: The information by health board and Scotland for the financial years 1994–95 to 1996–97 is set out in the table.

The costs shown include the value of ingredients and the cost of fees paid to community pharmacists for dispensing the drug.

The information is not available in the form requested before 1994–95.

Cost of methadone prescribing: 1994–95 to 1996–97

Health board	*1994–95 (£)*	*1995–96 (£)*	*1996–97 (£)*
Argyll and Clyde	100,617	142,918	206,117
Ayrshire and Arran	156,791	166,850	251,422
Borders	4,875	5,353	8,332
Dumfries and Galloway	31,710	48,304	53,417
Fife	30,591	59,354	86,943
Forth Valley	94,810	98,901	113,965
Grampian	186,454	264,363	269,263
Greater Glasgow	1,169,894	1,620,819	1,924,393
Highland	8,082	15,337	15,699
Lanarkshire	36,891	55,309	85,164
Lothian	435,881	533,992	631,033
Orkney	409	351	405
Shetland	96	1,390	1,712
Tayside	253,504	292,917	348,973
Western Isles	16	21	4
Scotland	2,510,621	3,306,179	3,996,832

Needle Exchange Services

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the qualification requirements for employees involved in needle exchange services. [11273]

Mr. Galbraith: No formal qualification for needle exchange workers exists, but, under the framework of guidance issued by the Scottish Office, such needle and syringe exchange schemes must be supervised by a registered medical practitioner.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ask a Scottish Lord of Appeal in Ordinary to discuss the Lockerbie case with *(a)* Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, *(b)* the Lord President, *(c)* Lord Mackay of Drumadom and *(d)* the Lord Advocate and report to him. [11129]

Mr. McLeish: No.

Crime and Punishment Act

Mrs. McKenna: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which further provisions of the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Act 1997 he intends to implement; and if he will make a statement. [12072]

Mr. McLeish: The key objective of our criminal justice policy is to protect the public effectively. It is against this background that we have reviewed the provisions of the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Act 1997.

We have already made a commencement order bringing certain provisions of the 1997 Act into force on 1 August—SI 1997/1712 (C.72) (S.128). We intend to bring a further tranche of provisions into force in October, including mandatory minimum sentences for persistent drug traffickers—section 2 of the 1997 Act—and new arrangements for criminal legal aid—part V of the 1997 Act).

We remain committed to consistency and honesty in sentencing, and will be bringing forward proposals to further these aims. However, we have concluded that the new arrangements for early release contained in part III of the 1997 Act are unsatisfactory and impractical, and we do not therefore propose to implement them in their present form.

We are not satisfied that section 1 of the Act, which provides for the sentences to be imposed in certain circumstances on repeat violent and sex offenders, as enacted, provides proper protection for the public against these offenders. However, given the seriousness with which we view the issue of repeat offending, we shall be consulting on how best to provide for the appropriate sentencing and improved supervision of such offenders.

In addition, we shall be taking a range of other steps to deal effectively with offenders and improve public protection. We shall be commencing section 5 of the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Act 1997 to enable the Secretary of State to set up pilot schemes for the electronic tagging of offenders.

Community-based sentences have an important part to play in punishing and rehabilitating offenders. I am therefore looking closely at the full range of disposals, both custodial and non-custodial, against our objectives of improving public safety, dealing effectively and rigorously with offending behaviour and increasing public confidence in the criminal justice system.

We will be consulting further on other options in developing a new strategy on criminal justice for Scotland which is tough, effective, workable and coherent.

Fisheries Research Services

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the key performance targets he has set for Fisheries Research Services for 1997–98. [12073]

Mr. Chisholm: For this, the first year as an agency, I have set the following targets.

Delivery of service

To carry out a customer satisfaction survey.

To achieve 70 per cent. of the milestones agreed for R and D projects.

To maintain, *pro rata*, FRS's publication output.

Quality of service

To submit, as required for accreditation of chemical measurements, the quality manual and documentation to the United Kingdom accreditation service.

To review the work of the Freshwater Fisheries Laboratory through a visiting group and to report by December 1997.

Financial targets

To carry out the agreed Scottish Office programme within the agreed costs.

To recover full economic costs from external customers.

To establish the proportional administrative costs of FRS and to compare them with those of other agencies.

To establish the cost per day of the FRS research vessels and to compare them with those of similar research vessels.

To establish the unit cost of fish disease inspections and to compare with other similar programmes.

These various measures or tasks should provide a solid basis for evaluating performance over the medium term, by establishing a time series for certain indicators and by the requirement for regular external scrutiny, whether by customers or scientific peers.

Scottish Tourist Board

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the forthcoming policy and financial management review of the Scottish tourist board. [12161]

Mr. Dewar: As part of the Government's rolling programme of five-yearly policy and financial management reviews of non-departmental public bodies, my Department will conduct a thorough review of the Scottish tourist board during 1997. The first stage of the review will take the form of a prior options study which will include an examination of the scope for discontinuing, privatising, contracting out or transferring to another body some or all of the functions carried out by the board. This study is now under way and I would welcome comments from interested parties. Comments should be sent by 6 October 1997 to:

Mr. Neil Clement

The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department

Area 3-G

Victoria Quay

EDINBURGH

EH6 6QQ

Referendum Publicity Costs

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what will be the final allocation in 1997–98 for expenditure on publicity in respect of the referendum on a Scottish Parliament. [12162]

Mr. Dewar: In 1997–98, £700,000 will made available through voted provision to meet the cost of publicity and other miscellaneous expenditure associated with the referendum on a Scottish Parliament. The provision will be made available through the miscellaneous category in the Scottish Office Home Department vote.

Parliamentary approval of this new expenditure will be sought in a 1997–98 winter supplementary estimate for the law, order and protective services, police grant and social work services, Scotland vote—class XIII, vote 5. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure will be met by a repayable advance from the contingencies fund.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Charter Unit

8. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the role of the charter unit in his Department. [9714]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The charter unit is responsible for taking forward the charter programme under our direction. In particular, it administers the charter mark award scheme, provides guidance to public service organisations, and disseminates best practice in public service provision.

Freedom of Information

13. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received regarding freedom of information. [9719]

15. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what recent representations he has received regarding freedom of information legislation. [9721]

Dr. David Clark: My Department has received representations from more than 70 organisations and individuals, all welcoming the Government's plans for greater openness and a freedom of information Act.

17. **Mr. Martyn Jones**: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the progress of the White Paper on freedom of information. [9723]

28. **Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the proposed White Paper on freedom of information. [9735]

Dr. Clark: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan).

18. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the obstacles to the early introduction of a White Paper on freedom of information legislation. [9724]

Dr. Clark: The time necessary to prepare fully considered proposals on this integral part of our radical programme of constitutional reform.

20. **Mr. Stringer:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he will take to study the experience of other countries in developing freedom of information legislation. [9726]

Dr. Clark: In developing our proposals for freedom of information legislation we are studying the experience of a number of other countries. I am planning to visit Canada, Australia and New Zealand later this year to look at the implementation and operation of their freedom of information regimes. I also took the opportunity to look at the American experience of freedom of information during my recent trip to the United States of America.

24. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what consultations he has had with ministerial colleagues on proposed freedom of information legislation. [9731]

Dr. Clark: I have had a number of useful discussions with ministerial colleagues.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if his proposals for freedom of information legislation will apply to *(a)* British Nuclear Fuels plc and *(b)* other publicly owned companies. [11227]

Dr. Clark: Our intention is that the freedom of information Act will apply [illegible] only to central Government Departments and agencies but to the public sector more widely. Details will be set out in the forthcoming White Paper.

Charters

14. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to reform the programme of charters. [9720]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) earlier today.

Public Services (Elderly People)

16. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what initiatives he is taking to consult elderly people on the use of public services. [9722]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I attended a forum of older people on 8 July. The participants discussed their use of public services, identifying key issues of concern, and ways in which new technology could be used to deliver services to older people. They also commented on an early draft chapter of a booklet we are producing with the Citizenship Foundation, Age Concern and Saga, which will cover rights as they relate to older people.

Public Services

19. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he plans to conclude his discussions on the citizens charter; and what are his plans for promoting and developing the quality of public services. [9725]

Mr. Kilfoyle: As we have already announced, we will be consulting widely on the future direction of the charter programme. We will take into account the results of this consultation and, of course, the report of the previous Public Service Committee on which the hon. Member sat. I hope that, around the end of this year, we will be in a position to relaunch the programme as an initiative that will make a real difference to the lives of ordinary people.

21. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the areas in which the electronic delivery of public services will have the greatest impact. [9728]

Dr. David Clark: Information technology will underscore our better government programme, informing all we do as a Government. We intend that electronic delivery systems will have a wide impact on all Government services in every part of the country and will benefit everybody.

Better Government Programme

22. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his better government programme. [9729]

Dr. David Clark: The White Paper on Better Government will set out how we intend to meet our commitment to rebuild the bond of trust between Government and the people, by opening Government out and by providing accessible services which better match the way that people need live their lives.

The White Paper will address four challenges for Government as we enter the new millennium:

Cleaning up politics;

Getting good results and rooting out waste;

Listening to the people;

Working together across institutional boundaries.

Public Appointments

23. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what guidance he has given the Commissioner for Public Appointments regarding his role in relation to reappointments of existing chairpersons of public bodies whose terms of office are or shortly will be due for renewal. [9730]

Dr. David Clark: None. The Commissioner for Public Appointments is independent of Government. His code of practice for public appointments procedures, which came into effect on 1 July 1996, states

> "Reappointments to the same post should not be automatic. The performance of the post-holder should be reviewed. A second reappointment should be exceptional and normally subject to a scrutiny process, including considering other candidates."

The code is supplemented by detailed guidance for Departments. Copies of the code and guidance are available in the Library.

Deregulation

25. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the Government's future plans for deregulation. [9732]

Dr. David Clark: We are committed to ensuring that regulations are simple, helpful and fair. We aim to deliver responsible and responsive regulation for business, particularly small firms, and the citizen. I have appointed Chris Haskins to chair a new better regulation task force and the deregulation unit has similarly been renamed the better regulation unit to reflect the fact that our priority is to get regulation right.

Food Safety

26. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what additional steps he is taking to ensure that food is safe to eat. [9733]

Dr. David Clark: At the request of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, I chair the ministerial group on food safety. As part of its work on the establishment of a Food Standards Agency, the group has looked at ways in which we can improve food safety arrangements in the interim. This work has involved a number of Government Departments, principally the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health. Later today, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will make a statement setting out these measures in full.

Quangos

27. **Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his plans to *(a)* abolish quangos and *(b)* introduce a significant element of democratic accountability to quangos. [9734]

Dr. David Clark: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stated in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) on 18 June, *Official Report*, column *174*, the Government believe that the previous Administration created too many unelected, undemocratic quangos. We have therefore instituted a review of quangos with the aim of reducing overall numbers.

Last Thursday, *Official Report*, column *693*, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley), I announced proposals to issue a discussion paper in the autumn, considering how democratic oversight of public bodies might best be enhanced. In the light of consultation, we have brought forward proposals in the White Paper on Better Government to be published later this year.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to improve the accountability of next steps agencies to Parliament. [9712]

Mr. Kilfoyle: We are considering whether there are any issues that need to be addressed in this area as part of our wider commitment to modernise Government services and make them more responsive.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the number and proportion of *(a)* Asians and *(b)* Afro-Caribbeans in each grade in the civil service. [11103]

Dr. David Clark: Information on the ethnic origin of civil servants is collected using a voluntary, self-classification, confidential questionnaire. The number and proportion of Asian and Afro-Caribbean civil servants, by grade equivalents, who have submitted a questionnaire, as at 1 April 1996 is set out in the table.

Grade Level by ethnic origin

Grade level	*Afro-Caribbean*	*Percentage Caribbean*	*Afro-Asian*	*Percentage Asian*	*Total Respondents*
SCS (1–5)	13	0.34	43	1.13	3,819
6	18	0.42	91	2.10	4,325
7	82	0.55	216	1.45	14,906
SEO	68	0.33	263	1.28	20,500
HEO	553	0.84	736	1.12	65,839
EO	1,494	1.54	2,280	2.35	96,929
AO	4,275	2.97	5,873	4.08	14,4099
AA	2,212	3.47	2,684	4.20	63,837
Other	5	0.33	8	0.53	1,505
Summary information	8,720	1.20	12,194	2.03	415,759

Central Office of Information

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what targets have been set for the Central Office of Information for 1997–98. [12164]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I have set Central Office of Information the following key performance targets for 1997–98:

- to achieve a surplus of £1 million in modified historical cost terms after recovering all costs including interest on borrowings;
- to achieve a further 2 per cent. increase in efficiency as measured by limit cost reduction;
- to achieve an average score of 8.25 out of 10 for the COI customer satisfaction index.

Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what performance targets he has set for the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency for 1997–98. [12166]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I have set the following key performance targets for the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency for 1997–98:

- to break even on an accruals basis;
- to deliver CCTA services within voted provisions;
- to establish a baseline for operation within the CCTA customer charter;
- to secure savings which will result in a 5 per cent. reduction in the cost of supporting services in 1998–99;
- to achieve 85 per cent. of customers assessing satisfaction with CCTA services at levels one and two of a five-point scale.

Civil Service College

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what key performance targets he has set for the Civil Service College for the current year. [12165]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The key performance targets for the Civil Service College for 1997–98 are:

- to break even in accrual accounting terms;
- to earn £1,500,000 from consultancy;
- to attract 1,515 students from the private sector;
- to attract 900 students from the private sector;
- to earn 88 per cent. of students' course evaluation in the highest two of six categories.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Parades and Marches

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which organisations applied to march in Northern Ireland in 1996 more than five times. [9978]

Mr. Ingram: The information is not available in the format requested and would incur disproportionate cost to provide.

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals she has to extend the remit of the Parades Commission to *(a)* grant special protection for traditional parades and *(b)* monitor other aspects of local culture in Northern Ireland. [10123]

Mr. Ingram: The Government have received representations about the remit of the Parades Commission, and is considering extending this remit beyond that recommended by the North report.

The forthcoming parades legislation will, as proposed by North, provide for the commission to take into account a range of factors including whether a parade is of long-standing. The commission will, in any particular case, weight up all the factors before reaching a conclusion.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many parades were applied for in 1996; how many were perceived as *(a)* unionist, *(b)* nationalist and *(c)* other; and which organisations filed for more than 10 parades in that year. [10125]

Mr. Ingram: The information is not available in the format requested and would incur disproportionate cost to provide. I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply given to the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) on 29 July 1997, *Official Report,* column *158.*

Internet

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will ensure that the Northern Ireland Office's web site on the Internet has adequate links to and from the web site of the Central Office of Information; and if she will make a statement. [11005]

Mr. Murphy: My Department is fully committed to using the potential of the Internet as an international communications medium and as an aid to open government. The NIO web site has more than 400 pages of information, regularly updated, on all political developments, security, crime, policing and community relations in Northern Ireland and including all press releases issued. In the period January to July 1997, visits to the site have increased from 1,187 to 25,353 per month.

A re-design now nearing completion will enhance content, visual appeal, user friendliness and links to and from other sites both within and outside Government, including the CCTA open government site and through it the Central Office of Information.

Expenditure

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list each increase in spending in excess of £50,000 by sub-heading in the Northern Ireland estimates, which she has approved. [11468]

Mr. Murphy: The table lists the specific areas where an increase in spending in excess of £50,000 has been approved in the 1997–98 Northern Ireland main estimates:

Line	*Net total 1997–98*	*Total net provision 1996–97*	*Increase £000*
Department of Agriculture Vote 1			
C: Domestic policy—National	27,801	17,177	10,624
Department of Agriculture Vote 2			
A: Agri-food development services	17,861	17,383	478
C: Veterinary services	17,800	16,823	977
G: Fisheries	5,198	4,027	1,171
J: EU structural funds	3,694	3,304	390
K: EU Peace and Reconciliation—Dept. Exp.	6,801	6,588	213
L: Matching funding for EU PRP—Dept. Exp.	2,265	2,196	69
Department of Economic Development Vote 1			
A: Land and buildings	30,699	22,399	8,300
B: Promotion	9,171	8,858	313
C: Assistance to Industry	7,352	6,467	885
D: Assistance to Industry	105,291	95,155	10,136
Department of Economic Development Vote 2			
F: Development of Tourism	13,935	13,580	355
H: Energy and Mineral	21,267	16,475	4,792
J: EU Peace and Reconciliation—Dept. Exp.	7,003	2,574	4,429
L: Matching funding for EUPRP—Dept. Exp.	2,335	858	1,477
M: Matching funding for EUPRP	2,968	473	2,495
Department of Economic Development Vote 3			
E: EU Peace and Reconciliation—Dept. Exp.	12,416	7,598	4,818
G: Matching funding for EUPRP—Dept. Exp.	4,139	2,486	1,653
H: Matching funding for EUPRP	1,130	1,026	104
Department of the Environment Vote 1			
E: Road passenger services	11,938	11,735	203
I: Matching funding for EUPRP	174	50	124
K: Other expenditure	6,127	6,000	127
Department of the Environment Vote 2			
B: Housing—other expenditure	2,345	2,212	133
D: Housing grant to NIHE (Public Corp)	138,000	136,290	1,710
Department of the Environment Vote 3			
A: Water Service	146,917	145,399	1,518
B: Privatisation	3,799	2,499	1,300
Department of the Environment Vote 4			
A: Environment and Heritage Service	21,501	21,419	82
F: Rate Collection Agency	6,597	6,397	200
G: Ordnance Survey of NI	5,118	4,913	205
L: Matching funding for EU PRP	9,349	2,155	7,194
Department of the Environment Vote 5			
A: Fire Services	43,836	43,471	365
Department of Education Vote 1			
A: Education and library boards—grants in aid	843,011	831,458	11,553
C: Voluntary and grant integrated schools	181,343	168,211	13,132
E: CCEA	8,776	8,485	291
I: Miscellaneous services, Administration and Research	2,588	2,384	204
J: F E Incorporation	1,508	1,000	508
X: Matching funding for EU PRP	4.853	1,082	3,771
Department of Education Vote 2			
A: Pensions, lump sums etc. Teachers Superannuation	39,677	29,171	10,506
Department of Health and Social Services Vote 1			
A: Hospital community H and PSS and family HS	1,272,324	1,246,301	26,023
C: Family HS (demand led) general medical services	72,643	69,907	2,736
D: Family HS (demand led) pharmaceutical services	149,524	141,736	7,788
E: Family HS (demand led) dental services	46,555	42,373	4,182
F: Family HS (demand led) ophthalmic services	10,937	9,829	1,108
H: Welfare foods	7,202	7,026	176
J: Other centrally financed services	2,553	2,261	292
K: Additional current advances to HSS boards	53,000	44,843	8,157
Department of Health and Social Services Vote 3			
E: Special Initiatives	3,168	1,382	1,786
H: EU PRP—Departmental expenditure	5,939	4,683	1,256
I: Matching funding for EU PRP—Depart expend	1,980	1,561	419
K: Matching funding for EU PRP	2,499	1,883	616

Line	*Net total 1997–98*	*Total net provision 1996–97*	*Increase £000*
Department of Health and Social Services Vote 5			
A: Benefits including Income Support for Elderly	1,121,618	1,055,806	65,812
B: Income support—non pensioners and jobseekers	601,905	572,669	29,236
Department of Health and Social Services Vote 6			
A: Independent living funds	5,198	5,077	121
B: Housing benefit (Rent)	270,567	263,901	6,666
C: Discretionary Rent Allowance	689	469	220
D: Housing benefit (Rates)	27,910	26,800	1,110
E: Payments into Social fund (Regulated)	3,564	3,440	124
Department of Finance and Personnel Vote 1			
A: Financial administration and Central Management of CS	13,322	13,008	314
E: Business Development Services	8,330	7,983	347
Department of Finance and Personnel Vote 3			
D: Matching funding for the EU PRP	415	300	115
Northern Ireland Audit Office Vote 1			
A: Northern Ireland Audit Office	3,645	3,448	197
Parliamentary Ombudsman for NI and NI Commissioner for Complaints Vote 1			
A: Parliamentary Ombudsman for NI and NI Commissioner for Complaints	587	515	72

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many plastic baton rounds were fired between 1 and 14 July in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997; and if she will make a statement [11067]

Mr. Ingram: In response to the widespread and serious public disorder during these periods, the number of plastic baton rounds fired between 1 and 14 July 1996 was 8,098 and in the same period in 1997 was 2,510, although the figures for 1997 may be subject to adjustment.

Public Appointments

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the reasons for the non-reappointment of Geraldine Donaghy to the Southern health and social services board; and if she will review the decision. [11494]

Mr. Ingram: Ms Donaghy's four-year period of appointment as non-executive director of the Southern health and social services board expired on 31 March 1997. In reviewing the vacancies in the Southern health and social services board, the Department of Health and Social Services decided to consider the merits of other candidates before making its recommendation to the then health Minister, the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss). This procedure is consistent with the Commissioner for Public Appointments code of practice.

On becoming Minister with responsibility for the Department of Health and Social Services, my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) was presented with a number of candidates rated as suitable for appointment by a panel which included an independent member, constituted under guidelines issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The decision was based on the merits of these individual candidates and there was no reason to review this decision.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the public appointments procedure in Northern Ireland in respect of nominations from the voluntary and community sector to health and social services boards. [11495]

Mr. Ingram: There is no statutory requirement that the Department of Health and Social Services seek nominations from the voluntary and community sector for appointments to health and social services boards. Appointment opportunities within DHSS bodies are advertised openly and anyone is free to self-nominate and be considered for such appointments. This is in line with the DHSS procedures for public appointments, which follow the Commissioner for Public Appointments' code of practice.

Industrial Research and Technology Unit

Ms McCafferty: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets have been set for the industrial research and technology unit for the financial year 1997–98. [12070]

Mr. Ingram: The following key targets have been set for the agency for 1997–98:

1. To maintain new user participation in the near market compete programme at 10 per cent.
2. To increase the average industry contribution to the compete and start—pre-competitive—programme by 1 per cent.
3. To achieve full cost recovery for scientific services.
4. To maintain NAMAS and BSI Accreditations.
5. To achieve efficiency savings of 3 per cent.

Prison Service

Ms McCafferty: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Northern Ireland Prison Service intends to publish its 1997 corporate and business plan; and what performance targets have been set for 1997–98. [12071]

Mr. Ingram: The Northern Ireland Prison Service's 1997 corporate and business plan was published today. For 1997–98 the following key performance targets have been set:

1. To ensure 100 per cent. security for prisoners in high and top risk categories. To ensure at least 99.5 per cent. security for prisoners in medium and low risk categories.
2. To ensure that the number of significant security breaches during 1997–98 does not exceed 7.3 per 100 prisoners.
3. To achieve an average five per cent. improvement in constructive activity hours during 1997–98.

4. To conduct a further customer satisfaction survey of visitors in each establishment.
5. To offer sentence planning to all prisoners and young offenders who wish to participate in the scheme and to achieve a 50 per cent. uptake from eligible prisoners.
6. To ensure that the average cost per prisoner place does not exceed £76,252.
7. To achieve an average of five days training per member of staff.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Standards Agency

Ms Shipley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what responses he has received to the consultation on Professor James's report on proposals for a food standards agency; and if he will make a statement. [11854]

Mr. John Cunningham: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and I, with the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales, and for Northern Ireland, welcome the excellent response to the consultation on Professor James's report. The Government have received replies from more than 630 organisations and individuals. The responses show that there is widespread support for the proposal to establish a food standards agency which would be a non-departmental public body accountable to Parliament through health Ministers and operating on a basis of openness and transparency; create a clear separation between the responsibilities for regulating food safety and for promoting the interests of food-related industries; promote food safety from "plough to plate".

Many detailed points were raised in the consultation, which we are now studying further. Our aim is to publish a White Paper in the autumn setting out the Government's response to Professor James's recommendations in the light of the first round of public consultation. The White Paper will itself be the subject of a second consultation and a draft Bill will then be drafted and published. We shall bring the Bill before Parliament as soon as parliamentary time permits.

It is the Government's intention to establish a shadow food standards commission once the necessary legislation has made sufficient progress through its parliamentary stages. We are also taking a range of measures to improve food safety arrangements in the transitional period before establishment of a food standards agency. The Minister for Food Safety and the Minister for Public Health will take on a joint role in preparing the way for the food standards agency and ensuring maximum protection for the public. They will carry out this day-to-day role in close consultation with their ministerial counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Overall policy co-ordination will rest with the ministerial committee on food safety, chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

A key feature of the transitional arrangements will be developing further the independent advisory committees that advise the Government as a whole on food safety and related matters. The Food Advisory Committee will be given a special role in the handling of food safety issues that go beyond the remit of any one expert committee.

In addition to these UK-wide measures, the Secretary of State for Health and I are taking specific steps to improve the management of food safety issues in England. A joint food safety and standards group will be formed from the relevant staff in MAFF and the Department of Health from 1 September 1997. The group will be headed by Mr. Geoffrey Podger, a Department of Health official currently seconded to MAFF. The new joint group will report to Ministers in both Departments. In Scotland, all food safety issues are handled by a single team which comes under the responsibility of the Scottish health Minister; in Wales all food safety issues come under the responsibility of the Welsh health Minister; and in Northern Ireland the Department of Health and Social Services has lead responsibility for food safety issues.

The chief medical officer, Sir Kenneth Calman, will be given a new high level co-ordinating role in the handling of issues of potential public concern about food. Sir Kenneth will have particular responsibility for a new joint MAFF-Department of Health risk communication unit which is to be established and further reinforced by the appointment of an external adviser. This role will be undertaken in consultation with territorial Departments.

We are also continuing to strengthen our approach to food safety issues taking account of the high priority we give to the protection of public health, the rigorous enforcement of measures designed to protect the public and our commitment to openness, transparency and responsiveness to consumer concerns.

I am placing copies of all the responses to the consultation on Professor James's report in the Library of the House.

Veterinary Field Service

Mr. Savidge: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the veterinary field service will become a next steps executive agency; and if he will make a statement. [12068]

Dr. John Cunningham: I have decided that the veterinary field service should not at present become an executive agency.

Following an internal review of MAFF veterinary services under the last Government, the VFS structure was streamlined. One recommendation in that review was that the VFS should become a next steps agency. It would be inappropriate to proceed with a move to agency status given the move towards establishing the food standards agency and devolution, which have implications for the state veterinary service.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the dumping of radioactive waste at sea. [12069]

Mr. Rooker: My Department and others concerned with the disposal of radioactive waste have undertaken detailed searches of archive records relating to dumping at sea at Beaufort's dyke and elsewhere. Details of the searches carried out so far and the findings of each Department have been placed in the Library of the House.

Information was found of two further instances of radioactive waste being dumped, or possibly being dumped, in Beaufort's dyke in addition to that reported to the House on 1 July, *Official Report*, columns *158–60*. The first instance was identified by the Scottish Office from a reference on one paper and relates to a disposal being arranged in 1957 at Cairn Ryan, a port used for the disposal of munitions to Beaufort's dyke, of a damaged closed caesium 137 source. There is no indication of the disposal site or any other information on the form of disposal. The level of radioactivity is described as about one quarter curie.

The second instance was identified by my Department concerning the dumping in 1976 of about 10,000 tonnes of building rubble and soil from the demolition of the premises of Thorium Ltd., a company that extracted thorium from minerals and left a waste product containing enhanced levels of naturally radioactive material. The authorisation required that the average radioactivity of this demolition material should be less than 10^{-4} microcuries/gm and was not to exceed 5×10^{-3} microcuries/gm in any part.

In respect of other locations not previously recognised as dump sites for radioactive waste, the Scottish Office has identified the following information:

scrap from a Ferranti radioactive valve manufacturing unit was dumped by Ferranti between 1954 and 1957 in the Firth of Forth off North Queensferry. An estimate at the time put this at 7.5 mg of radium bromide at six-monthly intervals;

advice to UK Time Ltd. in 1949 to dispose of 35,000 luminised dials likely to have contained in total between 25 and 50mg radium either on land or in sealed drums at least 5 miles off shore. A subsequent paper suggests that such dumping continued in the North sea during the 1950s;

the dumping by ICI Ltd. of two anti-static devices—strontium 90—at the explosives disposal site off the Isle of Arran prior to 1958;

the dumping in 1963 at Garroch head, on the Clyde, of material from the clear-up of a former radium factory at Balloch.

In checking these historic records, Departments have in addition identified instances when liquid wastes or sludge containing small amounts of radioactivity were dumped at sea through dispersion into the water column from ships. These disposals were from the naval dockyards at Chatham and Rosyth into the North sea beyond the Thames estuary and the Firth of Forth respectively during the mid to late 1960s and early 1970s; sludges from industrial sources containing enhanced natural radioactivity into the Liverpool bay area, and possibly Morecambe bay and the Humber estuary, during the early to mid 1970s; and mildly radioactive solutions from early experiments at MAFF's Lowestoft laboratory in the North sea in the late 1940s.

Where possible, these reports are being following up to see whether further information can be obtained.

On the evidence of the papers that have been examined, I am advised that, even using cautious assumptions, it is estimated that radiation exposures to the public following any dispersal of radioactivity in the sea would give rise to radiation dose levels well within the International Commission on Radiological Protection recommended dose limit and a small fraction of those arising from natural background radioactivity. Nevertheless, I am arranging for the National Radiological Protection Board to make an independent assessment of this information and anything further that can be found. In particular, I shall ask it to advise me of the radiological significance of the disposals and on whether there is any need for monitoring over and above that which is already undertaken. I shall report further to the House when I have received the board's advice.

Cattle Cull

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made on the selective cull; and if he will make a statement. [12074]

Mr. Rooker: Since 1 May, progress with the selective cull has substantially improved. In Northern Ireland, the cull is complete except for six animals and any which have been imported from Great Britain. In Great Britain, we have completed nearly half of the natal herd visits. In Scotland, we have completed all of them. In England and Wales, all but a few of the visits have been made to farms with animals in the compulsory years. We have now slaughtered 15,000 animals in the UK—10 times the number that had been slaughtered when we came to office. This is good progress, but we need to do better still.

We have looked at all our procedures to see what more can be done to speed up. We have recently reached agreement with the Commission that farmers can choose a valuer from a list of valuers drawn up by the Ministry where the valuation is for 10 or fewer animals. Up to now, many owners have opted to have two valuers, which has created problems in arranging valuations and thus slowed down progress with the cull. This new procedure is already being put into practice.

Now that owners can choose the valuer, I do not consider it necessary to have two valuers for 10 or fewer animals. I therefore propose to amend the BSE Compensation Order 1996 so that the option of having two valuers for 10 animals or fewer is no longer available. We regard this as necessary, particularly to ensure that we make maximum progress with animals that have moved away from their herd of birth and will mainly be dealt with as single animals. Farming and valuers organisations will be consulted on the draft amendments to the order, which in the interests of making speedy progress on the cull I propose to lay and bring into force during the recess.

It is in everyone's interests for the cull to be completed as soon as possible. That is the Government's aim and we will continue to look for ways to make faster progress. I hope that farmers will work with the state veterinary service to get through this difficult task as quickly as we can.

Intervention Board

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the Intervention Board performed against its targets for 1996–97; and what key performance targets he has set the agency for 1997–98. [12075]

Dr. John Cunningham: The Intervention Board's performance against its key targets in 1996–97 was as follows:

	Target (per cent.)	*Performance*
Percentage of claims processed within deadlines	99.0	85.0
Percentage of claims processed correctly	98.5	[1]99.5
Cumulative running cost efficiency gains	2.5	5.3
Improvement in index of productivity	6.0	3.0
Ratio of disallowance to European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund funds handled	0.40	Not yet known
To maintain expenditure within vote provision, cash and running cost limits	—	Met
New value for money savings in procurement of goods and services	6.0	6.8
Yield:cost ratio of anti-fraud activities	3.0:1.0	1.2:1.0

[1] Results for BSE-related schemes were based on a smaller sample of processed claims because monitoring on the same basis began later in the year.

In agreement with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland, I have set the following targets for 1997–98:

	Target (per cent.)
Percentage of claims processed within deadlines	99.0
Percentage of claims processed correctly	98.5
Cumulative running cost efficiency gains	2.5
Improvement in index of productivity	6.0
Ration of disallowance to EAGGF funds handled	0.40
To maintain expenditure within vote provision, cash and running cost limits	—
New value for money savings in procurement of goods and services	6.5
Yield: cost ratio of anti-fraud activities	3.0:1.0

Vitamin B6

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he took to consult interested parties prior to his announcement of a ban on higher dose vitamin B6 supplements. [10881]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) on 29 July 1997, *Official Report,* columns *20-21.*

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he proposes to take to impose a ban on higher dose vitamin B6 supplements. [10882]

Mr. Rooker: The Government have no intention of imposing a ban on higher dose vitamin B6 products. It has accepted advice from the independent Food Advisory Committee that the level of vitamin B6 in dietary supplements sold under food law should be limited to a maximum of 10 mg per daily dose. This limit will be introduced by regulations under the Food Safety Act 1990. However, higher dose products licensed as medicines for the treatment of specific clinical conditions will continue to be available from pharmacies and on prescription.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10742]

Mr. Morley: The Department and its agencies are responsible for collating and processing payments to staff including basic pay, sick pay and payments for excess hours worked, and so on. The Department performs this function for staff in the core Department, the Pesticides Safety Directorate, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science. The Department's other agencies—the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, the Meat Hygiene Service, the Central Science Laboratory and the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency—are responsible for their own payroll functions.

The Department and its agencies use the payroll services contractor, Chessington Computer Services Ltd., which is responsible for making the actual payments and issuing payment advice to staff.

The Department and its agencies use the Chessington Computer Services management system known as SPIRE—standard payroll input and retrieval. In addition, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science operates a small payroll system for about 30 locally paid industrial staff. There were no extra costs associated with this system in 1996–97.

The estimated total cost of the Department's, including agencies, payroll systems and processes in 1996–97 was £930,400. This figure does not include costs for the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency, which was established on 1 April 1997.

Gyrodactylus Salaris Parasite

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he proposes to take to prevent the spread of the parasite gyrodactylus salaris into United Kingdom rivers. [11474]

Mr. Morley: At the request of the United Kingdom, a safeguard measure was adopted last year by the European Commission prohibiting the import into the UK and Ireland of all live salmonids and requiring all imported salmonid eggs to be disinfected. Although the risk of introducing gyrodactylus salaris on angling equipment or clothing is very low, we also advise all those fishing abroad to ensure that any such equipment or clothing is either thoroughly dried or disinfected before, or on return to the UK.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has held with angling organisations regarding the possible spread of the parasite gyrodactylus salaris into United Kingdom rivers; and if he will make a statement. [11475]

Mr. Morley: Officials are in regular contact with a range of fishery organisations, including those with angling interests, and both they or I would be willing to discuss the action that we are taking to prevent the introduction of gyrodactylus salaris into the UK.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he has issued *(a)* generally, *(b)* to airports, port authorities and other points of entry to the United Kingdom and *(c)* to fishermen concerning the need to disinfect clothing and equipment when returning from abroad to prevent the spread of the parasite gyrodactylus salaris into United Kingdom rivers. [11476]

Mr. Morley: Advice is already contained in the Fisheries Department's booklet "Combating Fish Disease" which recommends all those fishing abroad to take precautions such as drying or disinfecting equipment to avoid the accidental spread of disease. Following the UK's success in achieving further EU safeguard measures to prevent the introduction of gyrodactylus salaris into the UK and Ireland, this advice is being reinforced by the issuing of specific leaflets.

Intervention Beef

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tonnes of stewed beef are currently in intervention storage; what plans he has for their distribution to *(a)* recipients of benefits and *(b)* asylum seekers not in receipt of benefits; and if he will make a statement. [10725]

Mr. Rooker: The EU surplus food scheme, as laid down by EU regulation 3149/92, as amended, allows member states to remove certain intervention stocks of produce from store and supply it to the poor and needy via charitable organisations. This year, the UK is withdrawing 5,000 tonnes of UK intervention beef from stock and arranging for it to be processed into canned stewed steak and distributed to more than 850 charities, local authorities and other non-profit-making organisations. Individuals eligible to receive the beef will each receive up to eight cans free or for a nominal charge.

Asylum seekers do not qualify in their own right to receive the food made available under the scheme. This is because eligibility for produce under the scheme had to be limited. In the UK, we have decided, in consultation with the Department of Social Security, to limit the eligibility criteria to those in receipt of income support, family credit, jobseeker's allowance—income-based only—disability working allowance, to the homeless and destitute and to those living in welfare hostels. Asylum seekers falling into any of these eligible groups may receive food under the scheme.

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each county *(a)* the total cost and *(b)* the (i) minimum, (ii) average and (iii) maximum payment made under the arable area payments scheme in 1996. [11319]

Mr. Rooker: The following table sets out figures for the total payments received by each claimant on a county basis. Payments are attributed to the county in which the claimant's main holding is situated.

1996 Arable Area Payments Scheme: payments made by MAFF, by county

County	*Total cost (a)* £	*Minimum payment (b)(i)* £	*Average payment (b)(ii)* £	*Maximum payment (b)(iii)* £
Avon	4,709.856.56	283.15	11.774.64	123,170.51
Bedfordshire	19,597,320.48	320,25	33,103.58	553,660.21
Berkshire	12,175,769.66	216,17	45,602.13	422,019.36
Buckinghamshire	17,752,348.30	253.53	27,480.42	542.108.36
Cambridgeshire	60,589,535.85	106.75	28,472.53	1,206,662.76
Cheshire	7,406,822.23	242.85	7.862.87	368,547.02
Cleveland	5,355,734.45	354.94	25,026.80	737,707.49
Cornwall	11,975,674.25	88.60	6,930.37	224,672.76
Cumbria	4,652,279.00	175,54	4,949.23	114,828.02
Derbyshire	10,983,321.95	213.50	12,812.35	180,067.52
Devonshire	19,330,196.61	57.47	7,237.06	251,981.94
Dorset	17,650,442.81	287.16	24,755.18	407,217.76
Durham	13,680,648.94	349.60	20,728.26	845,944.76
Essex	59,627,787.51	221.50	39,514.77	1,518,787.76
Gloucestershire	26,186,904.07	306.90	26,748.63	464,559.67
Greater London	1,446,717.13	4,296.65	46,820.22	250,938.12
Greater Manchester	1,500,373.83	277.55	10,640.95	86,408.78
Hampshire	34,666,737.76	273.01	43,993.32	564,418.73
Hereford and Worcester	29,681,294.79	76.86	14,892.77	314,987.48
Hertfordshire	21,368,780.29	544.42	44,518.29	317,883.04
Humberside	61,095,190.71	80.06	29,557.42	652,947.47
Isle of Wight	2,880.093.98	405.65	21,985.45	196.540.39
Kent	36,860,055.84	85.40	35,038.08	490,580.72
Lancashire	5,277,508.89	266.87	11,181.16	163,051.01
Leicestershire	32,095,569.54	314.91	29,177.79	2,016,524.30
Lincolnshire	103,734,277.51	80.06	30,790.82	1,207,130.02
Merseyside	2,604,950.92	621.81	5,057.52	100,668.33
Norfolk	66,168,770.11	112.09	23,023.23	545,025.98
Northamptonshire	37,540,542.75	400.31	41,758.11	585,034.06
Northumberland	28,953,072.17	472.36	34,426.96	293,822.26
Nottinghamshire	29,431,424.01	41.29	29,285.00	685,280.85

1996 Arable Area Payments Scheme: payments made by MAFF, by county

County	*Total cost (a)* £	*Minimum payment (b)(i)* £	*Average payment (b)(ii)* £	*Maximum payment (b)(iii)* £
Oxfordshire	38,316,438.90	70.72	41,512.93	587.762.52
Shropshire	25,216,768,32	163.86	15,750.64	781,745.97
Somerset	14,391,039.60	276.74	11,624.43	175,407.28
Staffordshire	14,959,966.24	335.73	17,980.73	282.582.13
Suffolk	56,350,015.14	149.45	26,923.08	628,974.97
Surrey	4,218,972.44	337.60	20,381.51	172,799.72
Sussex, East	9,598,132.74	370.95	21,472.33	217,018.66
Sessex, West	15,019,621.67	282.89	30,281.50	852,973.21
Tyne and Wear	2,911,625.25	661,84	26,469.32	108,904,93
Warwickshire	24,313,437.54	303.43	27,660.34	387,623.82
West Midlands	1,668,159.14	320.25	17,559.57	208,962.74
Wiltshire	36,319,698.82	242.85	35,364.85	364,971.01
Yorkshire, North	62,744,184.79	424.33	43,434.85	838,677.97
Yorkshire, South	12,962,208.55	250.99	24,319.34	230,836.52
Yorkshire, West	7,167,520.43	277.55	18,665.42	128,972.16

Brewing Industry

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the brewing industry in respect of bootleg imports from EU member states; and what response he plans to make. [11491]

Mr. Morley: My ministerial colleagues and I have been fully briefed by industry representatives about the impact on brewing and pubs of cross-border shopping. The issues here are primarily for the Chancellor, who announced a review of these matters in the Budget speech.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Licences

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 21 July, *Official Report*, column *448*, if she will list the other equipment, including weapons systems, covered by the six other export licences granted in respect of Hawk aircraft to Indonesia on *(a)* 19 December 1995 and *(b)* 22 November 1996. [10447]

Mrs. Roche: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of that letter in the Library. Inquiries are being made as regards the release of the information under the non-statutory code of practice on access to Government information and, since confidential information is involved, the consent of the company is being sought for the disclosure of that information.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on her current policy for licensing defence exports. [10641]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*, of the outcome of the review of the criteria used in considering applications for licences to export conventional arms.

Mr. Key: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many defence export licence applications were awaiting final Government approval on *(a)* 1 April, *(b)* 1 May, *(c)* 1 June and *(d)* 1 July. [10759]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The management data on the processing of licence applications by the Export Control Organisation are compiled on the basis of four-week periods rather than monthly, and by management unit rather than by the type of goods.

Accordingly, I am not able to give the position on precisely these dates as regards applications for licences to export goods entered under part III of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994—commonly known as the military list. However, I can give the following information on applications for individual licences to export controlled strategic goods, including goods on the military list.

Number of applications for individual export licence awaiting a decision

	Number
5 April 1997	1,702
3 May 1997	1,822
31 May 1997	1,844
27 June 1997	2,007

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many export licences have been issued to Alvis since 1990 in respect of Indonesia, stating in each case the date of the licence and the type of equipment covered by it, including the numbers of each type. [10342]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 24 July 1997]:* I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of that letter in the Library. Inquiries are being made as regards the release of the information under the non-statutory code of practice on access to government information and, since confidential information is involved, the consent of the company is being sought for the disclosure of that information.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many licence applications for arms and equipment exports to Indonesia are awaiting approval; if she will list the types of equipment and categories involved in the licence applications; and when she expects the decisions on the applications to be taken. [10575]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* At 24 July, a decision had not yet been reached on 59 applications for licences for the export of a wide range of goods controlled under part III of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order. The time taken to reach a decision will vary from case to case, and will depend on the time required for consultation with other Departments.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the Government's policies regarding the use of solar photovoltaic technology; and if it is included in her Department's review of renewable energy policies. [11459]

Mr. Battle: Government support for solar photovoltaic technology will certainly form part of the review of policy on new and renewable energy. In the meantime, we will continue with the research, design and development work under the Department's new and renewable energy programme, which is assessing PV technology, for example by monitoring a number of large-scale installations, such as the Ford factory roof at Bridgend and the Doxford offices at Sunderland. We are also supporting the deployment of PV in 100 schools and colleges across the country through the £2.5 million foresight "SCOLAR" initiative.

Business Links

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the *(a)* time scale and *(b)* cost of developing and Internet site for business links. [10586]

Mrs. Roche: The business link national Internet site was launched on 25 October 1996. The cost of the development of the site to the DTI will total £180,000 over a period of three years up until 13 October 1999.

The Government are developing an Internet-based enterprise zone, which will provide small and medium firms with a one-stop access point to Internet sites which provide the most appropriate and authoritative business-related information and sources of further support to meet firms' needs, including the business link network. The Government will be providing up to £200,000 for initial development of the site funded from existing resources. On-going management and enhancement will be undertaken on a fully commercial basis and we expect to be able to launch the site in the autumn.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total amount of funding provided by the Government for the business links network in 1996–97. [10633]

Mrs. Roche: The total amount of funding provided to the business link network in 1996–97 was £114.6 million. This comprised £41.1 million for business link development and £73.5 million for the delivery of business link services.

British Citizens Working Abroad

Mr. David Heath: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what regulations exist to ensure good practice by international recruitment agencies placing British citizens in jobs overseas; and what remedies are available to British citizens recruited in this way in the event of breach of contract or wrongful dismissal by the employers. [11209]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Agencies operating within England, Scotland and Wales are governed by the Employment Agencies Act 1973. The Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 1976 in particular impose responsibilities on agencies that place workers aborad. Similar legislation applies in Northern Ireland.

In the event of breach of contract by an overseas employer, including wrongful dismissal, remedies may be provided by local law. Contractual rights may also be enforceable in the UK courts, particularly if the contract was made under English law.

Mr. David Heath: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what safeguards exist to ensure fair treatment of British citizens recruited in the United Kingdom to work abroad by foreign-owned companies. [11208]

Mr. McCartney: Employment protection legislation generally applies to employees who ordinarily work in the UK, although some provisions have wider application. Employees covered by this legislation are therefore able to pursue their statutory rights in British courts or industrial tribunals. Employees who ordinarily work outside the UK must generally look to the law and legal system of the country in which they work for protection.

Trade Associations

Mr. Page: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of trade associations participating in the latest benchmarking exercise had established national vocational qualifications for their sector; and of those which had not, what percentage were in the process of establishing national vocational qualifications. [11399]

Mr. Battle: I regret that this precise information is not available. However, the benchmarking exercise showed that nearly half, 48 per cent., of the participants determined the skills requirements of their sector, and over three quarters, 77 per cent., worked with the relevant organisations to ensure training needs are met.

Mr. Page: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentages of all trade associations are classified as *(a)* small, *(b)* medium and *(c)* large by the breakdown of subscription income used in the recent trade associations benchmarking exercise. [11398]

Mr. Battle: The information is as follows:

Size of association	*Subscription income*	*Percentage of sample*
Small	£1–£200,000	24
Medium	£200,000–£1 million	46
Large	£1 million+	30

Mr. Page: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reasons a copy of "The Trade Associations' Performance", a report of a benchmarking exercise of trade associations published in May, has not been placed in the Library. [11397]

Mr. Battle: I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library today.

Mr. Page: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many trade associations refused to take part in the recent benchmarking exercise of trade associations' performance. [11396]

Mr. Battle: The Association of British Insurers, which managed the exercise on behalf of DTI, wrote to all UK trade associations on its database inviting them to take part. In the event, 135 elected to do so. The total number approached is not immediately available.

International Airport, Gaza

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what facilities and advice are available to United Kingdom companies wishing to participate in the development of the Palestinian international airport at Gaza. [11290]

Mrs. Roche: The development phase, including the provision of equipment, of the airport is now complete, but the commercial section of the British consulate-general at Jerusalem and the country desk in the DTI are available to offer detailed advice as further opportunities arise.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what funding is presently committed from his departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and whether he will make a statement. [11376]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* A programme of projects and other activities are running within the core DTI which aims to resolve the problems facing its IT systems as a result of the year 2000 date change. The following sums from departmental budgets have been approved to meet the cost of this programme:

1997–98: £1,460,000

1998–99: £986,000

1999–2000: £254,000.

The sum approved for 1999–2000 relates to monitoring activities necessary after the completion of remedial work in April 1999.

The Department's next step agencies have programmes of their own which they are funding.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–2000; and if she will make a statement. [11379]

Mr. Griffiths *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* Total estimated expenditure on computer-related work for the years in question by the core DTI, excluding next steps agencies, is as follows:

£000

	Capital	*Current*	*Total*
1995–96	16,269	11,222	27,491
1996–97	15,789	13,032	28,821
1997–98	12,268	13,562	25,830
1998–99	11,777	11,687	23,464
1999–2000	11,703	11,687	23,390

Figures for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are forecasts, as allocations for these years have not yet been agreed.

Employers' Liability Insurance

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make it her policy to require the inclusion of the insurer responsible for employers' liability insurance in each company's annual report; and if she will make a statement. [10523]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

I am aware of concern about employees unable to trace the insurer responsible for employer's liability insurance where a company has gone into liquidation. We are taking forward work on possible options for dealing with this problem as part of our current review of employers' liability legislation. The solution suggested is one of those under consideration. The Law Commission is also considering third party rights against insurers where the insured has become insolvent and will be issuing a consultation document in the autumn.

Energy Taxation

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which Minister will handle European negotiations over common energy taxation. [10459]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* I have been asked to reply.

The lead rests with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

WALES

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for his Department. [11556]

Mr. Ron Davies: Waste reduction is already an established and important aspect of my Department's strategy to enhance its environmental performance.

Annual Welsh Office green housekeeping action plans feature various schemes and initiatives which are improving efficiency and reducing adverse environmental effects. In particular, substantial quantities of waste paper, aluminium cans, toner cartridges, plastics, old wooden pallets and polythene packaging are being recycled.

The Welsh Office is committed to making its waste work and looking to do even better in future. Welsh Office staff are regularly encouraged to improve performance in this area, including the minimisation of waste at source.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by his Department in each of the last five years. [11558]

Mr. Davies: Waste paper recycling was introduced in the Welsh Office at the end of 1992. The quantities of paper recycled by my Department in each of the four years since are:

1993–94: 37,900 kg

1994–95: 24,640 kg

1995–96: 104,380 kg

1996–97: 104,800 kg

Expectations for the current financial year are higher and a target of 140,000 kg has been set.

Information relating to the proportion of waste paper recycled is not held centrally.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste within his Department. [11557]

Mr. Davies: My Department has a range of targets in place aimed at reducing the amount of waste it sends to landfill. This year, the Welsh Office aims to recycle 140,000 kg of waste paper, 7,500 aluminium cans and 600 printer toner cartridges. Old wooden pallets and polythene packaging, which have previously gone to landfill are now sent for recycling. More recently, the Welsh Office has introduced a new scheme for the collection of plastic cups, which is directing around 25,000 of these items away from landfill each months.

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many payments were made under the arable area payment scheme in 1996 *(a)* £0 to £1,000, *(b)* £1,000 to £2,000, *(c)* £2,000 to £3,000, *(d)* £3,000 to £4,000, *(e)* £4,000 to £5,000, *(f)* £5,000 to £10,000, *(g)* £10,000 to £20,000, *(h)* £20,000 to £50,000, *(i)* £50,000 to £100,000 and *(j)* over £100,000. [11316]

Mr. Win Griffiths: During 1996–97, the Welsh Office made arable area payments to 2,359 farmers, with the payments breaking down as follows:

(a) £0 to £1,000 = 453

(b) £1,000 to £2,000 = 504

(c) £2,000 to £3,000 = 334

(d) £3,000 to £4,000 = 299

(e) £4,000 to £5,000 = 387

(f) £5,000 to £10,000 = 95

(g) £10,000 to £20,000 = 171

(h) £20,000 to £50,000 = 101

(i) £50,000 to £100,000 = 11

(j) over £100,000 = 4.

Public Health Initiative

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the public health initiatives planned by his Department in *(a)* Clwyd, South and *(b)* Wales. [10955]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Initiatives specific to the Clwyd, South area will be a matter for North Wales health authority.

At the all-Wales level, there are many public health initiatives under way, and proposed, to prevent ill health. Primary prevention initiatives including the Welsh child health surveillance programmes, for example, play a vital role in monitoring the health and development of children. The childhood vaccination and immunisation programme represents one of the most effective public health interventions currently available. At very little cost, lifelong protection can be provided against infectious diseases—the health burdens of which can be enormous.

Public education campaigns are under way, including national campaigns dealing with a full range of public health issues such as smoking, diet, physical activity, substance misuse and healthy sexual behaviour. In particular, the "Back to sleep" campaign aimed at reducing the number of cot deaths has been very successful.

A wide range of legislation is in place to control the incidence of food-borne diseases and the Government are committed to protecting the public health through additional measures to ensure the safety of food, including the establishment of a food standards agency. Specific research initiatives under way including all-Wales projects aimed at reducing the number of cases of food poisoning and levels of infections acquired during hospital stays, are progressing well.

Secondary prevention measures including the early detection of breast and cervical cancers, for example, through screening programmes available in Wales, have significantly improved chances of survival from these diseases.

In my statement on 7 July, I made reference to the progress made with the 1989 strategic intent and direction for the NHS in Wales and the Welsh health survey in 1995. Subsequently, a streamlined set of health targets were announced by the Secretary of State for Wales on 10 June. These include prevention initiatives to reduce deaths from cancer of the lung, breast and cervix. Other target areas include coronary heart disease and stroke. We have also asked health authorities to draw up plans to reduce accident and suicide rates and to work to improve the quality of life of patients with a number of painful conditions.

All these initiatives, both existing and proposed, will continue to be afforded a high priority to provide the greatest possible health benefits for the people of Wales and ensure that health strategies address the adverse effects on health of social, economic and environmental factors.

Education Revenue Accounts

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will rank Welsh education authorities in order of percentage share of budget devoted to education revenue accounts for each of the last five years. [10750]

Mr. Hain: The information requested is given in the following table:

Revenue expenditure as a percentage of total local authority expenditure on education (ranked)[1]

	Per cent.
1992–93 outturn	
Gwynedd	97.0
Mid Glamorgan	97.0
Clwyd	96.0
Dyfed	96.0
West Glamorgan	96.0
Gwent	95.0
South Glamorgan	94.0
Powys	91.0
1993–94 outturn	
Mid Glamorgan	98.0
Gwynedd	98.0
Dyfed	97.0
Gwent	97.0
West Glamorgan	97.0
South Glamorgan	95.0
Clwyd	95.0
Powys	93.0
1994–95 outturn	
Gwynedd	98.0
Mid Glamorgan	97.0
Gwent	97.0
Dyfed	96.0
West Glamorgan	95.0
Clwyd	95.0
Powys	95.0
South Glamorgan	93.0
1995–96 budgets	
Gwynedd	97.0
Gwent	97.0
Dyfed	96.0
Mid Glamorgan	96.0
Powys	95.0
Clwyd	93.0
South Glamorgan	93.0
West Glamorgan	92.0
1996–97 budgets	
Blaenau Gwent	99.7
Gwynedd	98.0
Cardiganshire	98.0
Isle of Anglesey	98.0
Wrexham	98.0
Monmouthshire	98.0
Swansea	97.0
Denbighshire	97.0
Torfaen	97.0
Rhondda Cynon Taff	97.0
Merthyr Tydfil	96.0
Pembrokeshire	96.0
Caerphilly	95.0
Newport	95.0
Bridgend	95.0
Powys	95.0
Conwy	95.0
Carmarthenshire	94.0
The Vale of Glamorgan	93.0
Cardiff	93.0
Flintshire	92.0
Neath Port Talbot	92.0

[1] Higher and further education colleges transferred out of the local authority sector on 1 April 1992 and 1 April 1993 respectively and this may affect patterns of expenditure before and after these dates.

Contaminated Land

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to lay new regulations under the Environment Act 1995 concerning contaminated land in Wales. [10446]

Mr. Win Griffiths: We hope to make an announcement shortly of how we propose to proceed with the implementation of the contaminated land provisions in part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, inserted by section 57 of the Environment Act 1995.

Gwent Tertiary College

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by whom Mr. Cyril Lewis was appointed to carry out the investigation of Gwent tertiary college; what the terms of reference were for his investigation; how long Mr. Cyril Lewis's appointment is for; how much he is being paid; and what companies or individuals are being used as consultants in the investigation. [10328]

Mr. Hain: Mr. Cyril Lewis was appointed by the governors of Gwent tertiary college further education corporation to carry out the investigation of the college. The investigation's terms of reference, and Mr. Lewis's employment conditions are matters for the governors, who have also appointed Ernst and Young as financial consultants.

EAGGF

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total sum allocated to Wales under the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund for the last complete year for which figures are available, indicating how the fund was distributed; and what amount was given to each applicant. [10493]

Mr. Hain *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Details on EAGGF approvals to date under the rural Wales objective 5(b) programme, 1994 to 1999, and the Leader II programme, 1995 to 1999, by sponsor and measure is provided as follows. It is not practicable to provide information for a particular year.

Rural Wales SPD 1994–99—EAGGF approvals to date

	EAGGF grant approved £			
Sponsor	*Development of Agriculture and Forestry*	*Agri-tourism*	*Countryside enhancement*	*Total*
ADAS	482,500	—	243,500	726,000
Antur Teifi	115,861	—	—	115,861
Antur Waunfawr	—	—	8,250	8,250
ATB Landbase	423,064	—	—	423,064

Rural Wales SPD 1994–99—EAGGF approvals to date

	EAGGF grant approved £			
Sponsor	*Development of Agriculture and Forestry*	*Agri-tourism*	*Countryside enhancement*	*Total*
Brecon Beacons National Park	15,000	—	161,450	176,450
British Waterways	—	—	45,422	45,422
CCTA	909,145	—	—	909,145
CCW	73,250	—	1,089,375	1,162,625
Ceredigion County Council	284,000	—	—	284,000
Coed Cymru	790,500	—	—	790,500
Coleg Meirion Dwyfor	301,314	—	—	301,314
Coleg Powys	46,724	—	79,175	125,899
Cymad	20,550	35,000	—	55,550
DBRW	275,100	—	—	275,100
Dyfed Wildlife Trust	238,060	—	—	238,060
ECL	3,000	—	—	3,000
FCA Limited	36,848	—	—	36,848
Games Conservancy Trust	156,000	—	—	156,000
Glasfryn Forestry and Fencing	35,121	—	—	35,121
Glynllifon Border Leic. Breed Group	48,815	—	—	48,815
Groundwork Merthyr and Cynon	—	156,000	—	156,000
Gwynedd County Council	91,074	10,000	3,500	104,574
Gwynedd Training	30,823	—	—	30,823
Llangorse Riding Centre	—	299,928	—	299,928
Llysfasi College	592,000	—	122,688	714,688
Menter A Busnes	745,426	—	—	745,426
Mentor Mon	54,000	—	—	54,000
Mr. J. C. Williams Ellis	—	25,000	—	25,000
National Trust	174,215	—	135,065	309,280
Pembroke Machinery Ring	100,500	—	—	100,500
Pembrokeshire Business Initiative	141,000	—	—	141,000
Pembrokeshire Coast National Park	—	15,000	—	15,000
Pembrokeshire College	—	—	104,878	104,878
Powys County Council	—	61,500	—	61,500
Powys Rural Training Partnership	118,200	—	—	118,200
Primestock Products Cymru	76,350	—	—	76,350
RSPB	—	—	402,178	402,178
Shared Earth Trust	—	—	104,651	104,651
Snowdonia National Park	—	—	599,500	599,500
Snowdonia Woodland Trust	—	—	99,904	99,904
SPARC	147,630	—	—	147,630
Wales Young Farmers Club	33,200	—	37,150	70,350
Welsh Black Cattle Society	245,312	—	—	245,312
WFPL	497,080	—	—	497,080
WTB	—	425,000	—	425,000
Total	7,301,662	1,027,428	3,236,686	11,565,776

Leader II Programme 1995–99—EAGGF approvals to date

	EAGGF grant approved £			
Sponsor	*Acquisition of skills*	*Rural development programme*	*Transnational activities*	*Total*
ACT	8,172	15,421	—	23,593
Antur Teifi	—	160,050	33,044	193,094
Cadwyn	3,583	41,167	—	44,750
Cymad	—	75,500	—	75,500
Menter Mon	8,750	118,850	—	127,600
Menter Powys	2,500	197,400	8,000	207,900
Menter Preseli	20,080	72,263	720	93,063
SPARC	—	—	2,082	2,082
Total	43,085	680,651	43,846	767,582

TREASURY

Long-term Care Insurance

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he plans to regulate the marketing of long-term care insurance. [12080]

Mrs. Liddell: In December 1996, my predecessor issued a consultation document on proposals to regulate the marketing of long-term care insurance under the Financial Services Act 1986. These proposals were designed to complement proposals by the then Secretary of State for Health set out in his document "A new partnership for care in old age".

The Government do not intend to implement the previous Government's draft Bill on a partnership scheme. We feel that this was only a partial solution designed to help a relatively small number of people and that what is needed is a more fundamental and wide-ranging review of all the options.

In view of this, the Government intend, as set out in their manifesto, to examine provisions for long-term care for the elderly. The Government will make a further announcement on this once the form and content of that examination have been settled.

These policy developments have important implications for the balance of argument for and against early action to regulate the marketing of long-term care insurance. The broader policy debate is likely to have fundamental implications for the future of this market and for its regulation. It is my decision, therefore, that it would be premature to proceed now to amend the scope of the Financial Services Act 1986. Once the broader policy debate has been taken forward, I shall consider carefully the implications for the regulation of marketing of long-term care insurance.

In the interim, I shall of course monitor the market closely for evidence of significant risks to consumers and will take appropriate action if that is warranted.

Office for National Statistics

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the Office for National Statistics performed against its key targets in 1996–97. [10385]

Mrs. Liddell: The Office for National Statistics' performance for 1996–97 is described in the agency's annual report and accounts, which is being laid before the House and published today. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The ONS achieved eight out of its nine key targets, with the ninth, relating to release of publications in accordance with its publications plan, being partially achieved. Targets for 1997–98 and ONS's business strategy are set out in the "ONS Business Plan 1997–2000", which was published in March. Together, these will ensure continuing improvements in its performance in 1997–98.

Ministry of Defence Budget

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the purchasing power of the Ministry of Defence budget for the next three years resulting from his revised estimates of inflation. [7567]

Mr. Darling: The comprehensive spending review, which was announced on 11 June, is addressing priorities across all Government expenditure both in the medium term and long term. The strategic defence review, which was announced on 28 May, will be integrated with the wider comprehensive spending review.

EMU Information Campaign

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will request EU funding to finance his information campaign on economic and monetary union. [10952]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government are considering whether to request European Community funding to help finance the task of informing UK businesses about the practical implications of economic and monetary union which would arise whether or not the UK joins the single currency.

Oil Seed Rape Fuel

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the advantages of reducing the excise duty on fuel made from oil seed rape; and what representations he has received on this subject. [10491]

Dawn Primarolo: I have made no such assessment.

I have received one representation on this subject.

Personal Equity Plans

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will change the rules governing PEPs to allow PEP holders who have investments in unlisted securities market companies which migrated to the alternative investment market—AIM—following the closure of the unlisted securities market to continue to hold these investments in their PEP. [10367]

Dawn Primarolo: No. AIM shares may qualify for the tax reliefs available for investment in unlisted companies.

Income Tax

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many registered voters in Scotland presently pay income tax at the standard rate or above; [10127]

(2) how many registered voters in Scotland do not pay income tax at the standard rate or above. [10126]

Dawn Primarolo: It is not possible to identify which taxpayers are registered to vote.

General Government Expenditure

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the reduction in real general Government expenditure in 1997–98 and 1998–99 consequential on the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" projected increase in the gross domestic product deflator. [8140]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 11 July 1997]:* In the last Budget, general Government expenditure increased in cash terms by £0.4 billion in 1997–98 and by £4.1 billion in 1998–99 compared with the projections in the 1996 Budget. In 1995–96 prices, using the latest GDP deflator forecasts, there was a real reduction of £2.6 billion in 1997–98 and £1.5 billion in 1998–99.

Economic and Monetary Union

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the legal base for use of qualified majority voting in the creation of an action programme for the enhancement of administrative co-operation between the indirect tax authorities in the European Community, as detailed in COM (97) 175; and what representation he has made in respect of its use in this respect. [10200]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 22 July 1997]:* The European Commission has proposed that the legal base for this action programme—the FISCALIS programme—should be article 100a of the treaty establishing the European Community, so making it a matter for co-decision with the European Parliament and qualified majority voting in the Council.

The UK remains firmly committed to unanimity as the basis for Community-level decision making on all substantive tax matters.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government would be prepared to join the economic and monetary union at the presently prevailing value of the pound; and if he will make a statement. [11336]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* It would be premature to speculate on an appropriate rate for joining EMU. The Chancellor does not propose to make a statement.

Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what circumstances the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe is able to handle matters relating to tax. [10426]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 24 July 1997]:* The Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe has a project-based portfolio in the Treasury which may include some tax issues. However, arrangements are in place to ensure that the Minister is not involved in issues that could give rise to conflicts of interest.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of people receiving tax relief for private medical insurance who will not renew their current policies as a result of the Budget measure to terminate such tax relief. [10305]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 24 July 1997]:* No firm estimates are available of the number of people receiving tax relief who will not renew their current policies as a result of the Budget measure.

Value Added Tax (Businesses)

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many VAT-registrable businesses there were in the United Kingdom in each year since 1979. [10838]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Customs does not hold information on the number of VAT-registrable businesses in the United Kingdom in each year since 1979. However, the number of businesses actually registered for VAT in the UK in each financial year since 1983 was as follows:

Financial year	*Registered businesses*
1983–84	1,433,100
1984–85	1,458,900
1985–86	1,477,400
1986–87	1,505,500
1987–88	1,554,000
1988–89	1,623,866
1989–90	1,710,106
1990–91	1,745,097
1991–92	1,677,829
1992–93	1,632,013
1993–94	1,593,770
1994–95	1,579,869
1995–96	1,573,620
1996–97	1,595,271

Nationalised Industries

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total net external financing limit at current prices of Britain's nationalised industries in each year since 1974. [10919]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* External financing limits were introduced in 1976. Outturn performance against an EFL is recorded as the external financing requirement. The total EFR for the nationalised industries in each year since 1976–77 in current prices is provided in the table.

Total external financing requirements of nationalised industries in 1996–97 prices

	£ billion
1976–77	8.71
1977–78	4.84
1978–79	7.07
1977–80	6.89
1980–81	6.48
1981–82	4.61
1982–83	4.06
1983–84	4.12
1984–85	6.73
1985–86	2.78
1986–87	0.55
1987–88	0.29
1988–89	–0.64
1989–90	1.23
1990–91	4.22
1991–92	4.33
1992–93	4.83
1993–94	3.86
1994–95	1.05

Total external financing requirements of nationalised industries in 1996–97 prices

	£ billion
1995–96	–0.36
1996–97	0.48

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what subsidy was paid to each of the nationalised industries between 1974 and their year of privatisation. [11344]

Mr. Robinson *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The external financing requirement of a nationalised industry has been used since its introduction in 1976 as the consistent measure of financial support an industry requires to supplement income from its trading activities. The EFR is a measure of the cash needed by the industry to fund investment and meet costs not covered by revenue. As such, it is only an indirect measure of subsidy. Information presented on this basis has been available since 1976–77. Table 3.11 of the "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1997–98", Cm 3601, lists EFRs from 1978–79 and 1982–83 onwards. The EFRs for key nationalised industries from 1976–77, unless otherwise indicated, to privatisation are as follows:

	£ billion
British Coal	16.2
British Gas	[1]–3.6
BNOC	0
British Steel	6.0
British Airways	0
British Rail	11.1
British Shipbuilders	1.3
British Telecommunications from 1981–82	[1]–1.0
Electricity, England, Wales and Scotland	[1]–3.8
Water, from 1978–79	2.2

[1] A negative EFR represents a net benefit to the public finances.

Public Sector Debt

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average level of public sector debt as a percentage of gross domestic product in *(a)* 1974–75 to 1978–79 and *(b)* 1979–80 to 1996–97. [10883]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The average level of net public sector debt from 1974–75 to 1978–79 was 55 per cent. of gross domestic product. The average from 1979–80 to 1996–97 was 40 per cent. of GDP.

Business Taxes

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the percentage of gross domestic product constituted by business taxes for *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* France and *(d)* Italy in each year since 1974–75. [10894]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Taxes on business as a percentage of GDP

	1975	*1980*	*1985*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
United Kingdom	8.5	9.9	10.3	9.7	9.3	8.6	8.0	8.0
Germany	9.2	9.9	10.1	9.4	9.8	9.7	9.6	9.5
France	14.8	16.4	17.3	17.0	16.9	16.8	16.8	16.8
Italy	11.3	11.1	11.9	13.3	13.1	13.8	13.6	12.8

Notes:

(1) Taxes on business include corporate taxes, employers social security contributions, taxes on payroll, taxes on property and other taxes.

(2) Prior to 1990 data available on a five-year basis.

Source:

Revenue Statistics, 1965–1995, OECD (1996 Edition).

Computers (Century Data Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 July, *Official Report*, column *590*, on the year 2000 problem, what estimate he has made of the cost in respect of computer systems in non-governmental public bodies and other government bodies for which Government Departments have responsibility; and if he will make a statement. [11369]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 29 July]:* The fully costed plans that Government Departments are producing by October 1997 will include any areas of the wider public service, including non-departmental public bodies and other Government bodies for which Ministers have sponsorship responsibilities.

Building Societies

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what policy action he is considering to avoid demutualisation of building societies adding to consumer demand in 1997–98 and 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [11337]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* We have received a number of representations suggesting steps that the Government might take to deter further demutualisations of building societies. The Government are committed to the benefits of the mutual building society and the opportunities for choice for the consumer. However, a number of UK representatives raise difficult issues of principle because they could frustrate the will of the members, or significantly reduce the board's accountability to them. Nevertheless, we are keeping the situation under review.

Contingency Reserve

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when *(a)* initial and *(b)* final decisions will be taken on the allocation of the contingency reserve for (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [11342]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* Decisions on the allocation of the reserve for any particular year are taken in the course of that year as the circumstances requiring use of such funds arise.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the value of the contingency reserve set in each Budget since 1980 for the succeeding financial year *(a)* in nominal terms and *(b)* as a percentage of total general Government expenditure; and if he will make a statement. [11371]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The figures are given in nominal terms in the table. The coverage of the reserve has varied with the definition of the control aggregate. For example, in 1990–91, the planning total was redefined to exclude self-financed expenditure by local authorities. In 1993–94, this was in turn replaced by the control total, which included all local authority expenditure but excluded cyclical social security spending and privatisation proceeds.

Year	*Reserve (£ billion)*	*As percentage of GGE*
1981–82	1.6	1.3
1982–83	1.7	1.3
1983–84	1.5	1.1
1984–85	3.0	2.0
1985–86	3.0	1.9
1986–87	4.5	2.7
1987–88	3.5	2.0
1988–89	3.5	2.0
1989–90	3.5	1.7
1990–91	3.0	1.4
1991–92	3.5	1.5
1992–93	4.0	1.5
1993–94	4.0	1.5
1994–95	3.5	1.2
1995–96	3.0	1.0
1996–97	2.5	0.8
1997–98	2.5	0.8
1998–99	2.8	0.9

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the present size of the contingency reserve for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–00, what allocations out of these reserves have so far been approved, and if he will make a statement. [11341]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The reserve announced in November 1996 for 1997–98 was £2.5 billion. The main estimates included allocations of £200 million from the reserve to Departments and the summer supplementary estimates included allocations of a further £52 million. The reserve for 1998–99 will be £2.8 billion, reflecting the Chancellor's decision to allocate an extra £1 billion to schools and £1.2 billion for the NHS from the £5 billion reserve set in the November 1996 Budget. The reserve for 1999–00 was set at £7.5 billion in the November 1996 Budget, but the size of the control total and the reserve will be decided as part of the comprehensive spending revenue now underway.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–00; and if he will make a statement. [11368]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The estimated expenditure, for the years required, on computer-related current and capital work, including the salaries of specialist staff, is as follows:

£000

	Current	*Capital*	*Total*
1995–96	3,130	4,995	8,125
1996–97	2,812	3,833	6,645
1997–98	4,538	2,200	6,738
1998–99	2,528	1,901	4,429
1999–00	2,484	2,088	4,572

Inflation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the merits of targeting inflation on the RPIY basis instead of on the RPIX basis; and if he will make a statement. [11373]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* RPIX inflation is now a well-understood and accepted measure, RPIY has the property of excluding indirect taxes, which is useful for some purposes, but it does not measure prices actually paid in the shops and it does not measure what inflation would be in the absence of indirect tax changes. It is also less widely used and less well understood. On balance therefore, the Government decided that RPIX was the better target, but the Bank of England will continue to monitor RPIY in its "Inflation Report".

Road Haulage Industry

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the tax concession and subsidies from public funds available to the road haulage industry; [11115]

(2) if he will estimate the net subsidy from public funds to the road haulage industry in the last year for which figures are available. [11116]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* None. Neither subsidies not tax concessions are available to the road haulage industry.

Air Passenger Duty

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the advantage of waiving air passenger duty on domestic flights to Northern Ireland and offshore islands. [10803]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* It would be illegal, under EU law, to waive air passenger duty on domestic flights to Northern Ireland and offshore islands.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the total amount collected in the last financial year from air passenger duty; and how much was collected from *(a)* domestic scheduled services, *(b)* international scheduled services and *(c)* charter services. [10802]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The total revenue collected for air passenger duty in the last financial year—1996–97—was £356 million. We do not have information on revenue from scheduled, international and charter services separately.

Earnings

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the take-home pay at current prices of a married couple with two children with the husband on national average male earnings in *(a)* 1978–79, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* estimated for 1997–98. [10893]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Estimates are given in the table.

Take-home pay for a one earner married couple with two children under 11[1]

	£ per week
1978–79	73.45
1996–97	312.30
1997–98	328.80

[1] Assuming full-time male average earnings, on adult rates for all occupations. Take-home pay is net of child benefit.

Shareholders

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the number of individuals owning shares in each year since 1979. [10885]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the then Central Statistical Office, now the Office for National Statistics, report on share ownership at 31 December 1994 published by HMSO and available from the Library of the House.

VAT (Auctions)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under what powers the European Commission intends to take the United Kingdom to court over VAT on auctioneers' fees; [11308]

(2) on what date he was notified of the intention of the EU Commission to initiative proceedings against the United Kingdom on VAT on auctions of art, antiques and other items sold at auctions. [11307]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The EC Commission announced its decision to initiate the first formal stage of proceedings in a press release issued on 24 July.

If the EC Commission eventually decides to take the matter to the European Court of Justice, it would do no so under article 169 of the EC treaty.

Excise Duty (Beer)

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the excise duty on beer as a proportion of the price of beer in each year from 1974–75 to 1997–98. [11259]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The table following shows excise duty as a percentage of the price of a pint of bitter in licensed premises, for years up to 1997.

A forecast for 1998 is not available.

Years	*Duty as percentage of price*
1974–75	28.1
1975–76	26.2
1976–77	25.0
1977–78	23.1
1978–79	20.8
1979–80	20.7
1980–81	24.7
1981–82	25.1
1982–83	24.8
1983–84	23.3
1984–85	23.2
1985–86	22.1
1986–87	21.3
1987–88	20.8
1988–89	19.5
1989–90	18.9
1990–91	18.1
1991–92	17.7
1992–93	17.6
1993–94	16.2
1994–95	16.1
1995–96	15.6
1996–97	15.1

The figures relate to April/May for years up to and including 1993 other than 1979, where the July price has been used. From 1994, the percentage relate to January each year.

Carbon Tax (Aviation Fuel)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to introduce a carbon tax on aviation fuel. [10801]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* I have no such proposals to make at present.

GDP Growth

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the average rate of annual gross domestic product growth in each member of the G7 group of nations over *(a)* 1974 to 1979, *(b)* 1979 to 1996, *(c)* 1975 to 1981, *(d)* 1981 to 1992 and *(e)* 1992 to 1996. [10886]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Philip Hammond, dated 30 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on average rates of annual growth in gross domestic product (GDP) in each member of the G7 group of nations.

The Office for National Statistics only collects information on UK GDP.

As regards each member of the G7 group of nations such information as is available is published in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development publication *National Accounts*, detailed tables, volume 1, 1997 edition, which is available in the House of Commons Library. Part five of this publication contains GDP volume growth tables, by country, for a run of years.

Abortions

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many abortions were performed and what was the abortion rate by age group for each year since 1990. [11328]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, dated 30 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent parliamentary question on the number of abortions since 1990.

The information for England and Wales residents is available in the OPCS/ONS Abortion Statistics publication, Series AB Nos. 17–22, 1990–95. Similar information for 1996 is published in the ONS Monitor Series AB 97/4, Legal abortions in England and Wales 1996. These publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

DEFENCE

Hunting

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will announce which officials will conduct the review of hunting on Ministry of Defence land; [7917]

(2) when he will announce who will give evidence to those conducting the reviews *(a)* of hunting on MOD land and *(b)* of hunting on Forestry Commission land. [7865]

Mr. Spellar: The investigation into hunting with hounds on Ministry of Defence land, and the consequences of stopping such hunting, is being carried out by officials in the Defence Estate Organisation. This is an internal review which will take into account those representations received from all interested parties.

The review of hunting on Forestry Commission land is a matter for the Forestry Commission.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which officials will be involved in the review of hunting on his Department's land; [8847]

(2) who will be invited to give evidence to his review of hunting on his Department's land. [8846]

(3) when he expects to publish the conclusions and evidence of the review of hunting on Ministry of Defence land. [8840]

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the review of hunting on his Department's land will be completed; what is the composition of the body undertaking it; and what are its terms of reference. [8728]

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) who will give evidence to the review of hunting on his Department's land; [10286]

(2) which officials will carry out the review of hunting on his Department's land; [10283]

(3) what factors led him to conduct a review of hunting on his Department's land. [10285]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave today to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock).

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representations he has received from *(a)* supporters and *(b)* opponents of hunting on the subject of hunting on Ministry of Defence land; and if he will list them. [8839]

Mr. Spellar: A substantial number of representations has been received both from supporters and from opponents of hunting on Ministry of Defence land. In the absence of their permission to do so, I do not propose to list the names of those individuals who have made such representations.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much he estimates the review of hunting on Ministry of Defence land will cost his Department. [8845]

Mr. Spellar: The review of hunting on Ministry of Defence land and the consequences of stopping such hunting is being conducted by MOD officials as a part of their continuing duties.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what representations he has received from farmers with land adjoining Ministry of Defence land concerning co-operation agreements if hunting is banned; [8841]

(2) what assessment he has made of the potential impact on the armed services if co-operation agreements with farmers of land adjoining Ministry of Defence land were withdrawn following the banning of hunting. [8842]

Mr. Spellar: We have received a number of representations from those with land adjoining or near Ministry of Defence land, concerning continued co-operation with the Military if a decision were taken not to renew licences for fox hunting with hounds on Ministry of Defence land.

We greatly value the excellent relations the armed forces have with landowners throughout the country, and are assessing these responses as part of the review currently being conducted.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons a review of hunting on his Department's land has been commenced; and when it will be conducted. [8844]

Mr. Spellar: The Government came into power with a commitment to allow a free parliamentary vote on hunting with hounds. Against this background, we wish to ascertain the extent to which Ministry of Defence land is used for hunting and what the consequences would be of ending such use. This investigation is not yet complete, but taking full and proper account of the legal issues involved and the fact that it would be wrong to anticipate the outcome of the parliamentary process, the current situation will be allowed to continue. Licences for fox hunting on Ministry of Defence land for the 1997–98 hunting season will be renewed on application. These will be limited to hunts which have traditionally held such licences and the scope and area covered by the licences will not be extended. These licences will contain a termination clause on one month's notice.

Defence Companies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures are taken to safeguard matters of national security in United Kingdom subsidiaries of foreign-owned defence companies. [11205]

Mr. Spellar: Every defence contractor needing access to information or material marked "confidential" or above requires the appropriate security clearance. A subsidiary of a foreign-owned company must ensure that no foreign national will have access to such information without the approval of my Department. At least 50 per cent. of its UK-resident directors must be UK nationals and the number of foreign nationals transferred from the parent company to work in the UK subsidiary must not be excessive, having regard to all the circumstances. My Department must be satisfied that the arrangements that are made meet UK national security requirements and is assisted in coming to a determination by the Security Service.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what account is taken in procurement decisions of the ultimate ownership of the bidders. [11204]

Mr. Spellar: This is one of the many factors which are taken into consideration when procurement decisions are made.

Strategic Defence Review

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the conclusions of phase 1 of the strategic defence review under the code of practice on access to official information. [11086]

Mr. George Robertson: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply of 28 July, *Official Report,* column 75.

Equipment Exhibition

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will cancel the invitation to the three Indonesian generals to attend the Royal Navy and British Army equipment exhibition at Farnborough in September 1997. [8907]

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will refuse permission for representatives of the Indonesian Government to attend the Farnborough arms fair. [11137]

Mr. Spellar: No. It is well understood by all those who attend RNBAEE that the Government consider licence applications for defence exports on a case-by-case basis. Attendance at the exhibition does not imply that we will license the export of any equipment to any particular country.

Duke of York's Royal Military School

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Duke of York's Royal Military School for 1997–98. [12206]

Mr. Spellar: The chief executive has been set the following key targets for 1997–1998:

1. To achieve 100 per cent. of GCSE passes at grade A* to G.
2. To achieve five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C for 78 per cent of candidates.
3. To achieve 88 per cent. of A-level passes at grades A to E.
4. To achieve three or more A-level passes at grades A and E for 80 per cent. of candidates.
5. To achieve 34 per cent. of A-level passes at grades A and B.
6. To achieve 100 per cent. award rate for GNVQ advanced and BTEC national diploma courses.
7. To achieve places in higher education for 70 per cent. of sixth form leavers.
8. To achieve a pupil per capita cost of £12,633[1].
9. To generate income of £427,000.
10. To achieve 250 applications for September 1998 intake.

[1] Based on MoD Land and Property valuations as at 1 January 1996.

Service Children's Education

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for Service Children's Education for 1997–98. [12217]

Mr. Spellar: The chief executive has been set the following key targets for 1997–98:

1. Exceed UK LEA average of pupils gaining A* to C grades in five or more subjects at GCSE by 2 per cent.
2. Exceed UK average percentage pass rate at grades A* to C by 1 per cent.
3. Maintain an overall percentage pass rate for GNVQ intermediate level at 91 per cent.
4. Exceed UK average pass rate at standard attainment tasks and tests—SATS—at each of ages seven, 11, and 14 in English, Maths and Science by 2 per cent.
5. Implement the SCE elements of the MOD scheme(s) for the provision of nursery education overseas from September 1997 for a trial/pilot scheme.
6. To achieve a percentage reduction in real terms in pupil per capita costs—measured against total agency resource costs—of 2.5 per cent.
7. Achieve an index of satisfaction with service children's education within the Army wives continuous attitude survey above 352.
8. Ensure percentage of inquiries and/or requests answered within 10 days of receipt is at least 85 per cent.

Naval Manning Agency

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Naval Manning Agency for 1997–98. [12210]

Dr. Reid: The chief executive of the Naval Manning Agency has been set the following key targets for 1997–98:

1. Greater than 93.7 per cent. of officer billets to be filled.
2. Greater than 94.1 per cent. of Naval rating/Royal Marine other ranks billets to be filled.
3. Total strength of naval personnel measured as three year average to be within 1 per cent. of the set requirement.
4. Greater than 60 per cent. of officers to receive more than 4 months notice for change of employment.
5. Greater than 98 per cent of ratings/other ranks to receive more than the specified notice for change of employment.
6. The number of occurrences where minimum time ashore criteria are not met to be fewer than 150 per year.

7. To achieve a progressive annual 10 per cent. reduction in the number of manpower gaps within the scope of the agency's control.
8. To conduct two bench-marking exercises per year.
9. To produce trial accruals-based accounts for the period 2 July 1996 to 31 March 1997.
10. To produce full accruals-based accounts from 1 April 1997.

Queen Victoria School

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Queen Victoria School for 1997–98. [12218]

Mr. Spellar: The chief executive has been set the following key targets for 1997–1998:

1. To maintain the staying on rate at school for S4 to S5 at a minimum of 68 per cent. based on a three-year trend.
2. To maintain the percentage of pupils obtaining at least five credit awards at standard grade at 2 per cent. above the average for all Scottish presentations, based on a three-year trend.
3. To maintain a percentage of the presentations at higher grades achieving A to C at least equal to the Scottish average based on three-year trend.
4. To complete the review in all 5–14 subjects by March 1998 in the second phase of planning and development of the 5–14 national programme.
5. To complete the audit requirement for learning support throughout the whole school and modify the school development plan accordingly.
6. To implement measures resulting from the audit of teaching and learning in S4 and S5/S6.
7. To continue with the dynamic programme of measures to ensure a satisfactory report from the welfare inspector required by the Children(Scotland) Act 1995.
8. To prepare appropriate senior staff in the process of conducting individual teacher staff appraisal coupled with subject reviews for introduction by March 1999.
9. To have successfully completed the second phase of admission of girls by March 1998.
10. To implement recommendations of the prep working group by March 1998.
11. To achieve pupil per capita cost of £17,420 by March 1998.
12. To generate commercial income to the school of £20,000 per annum.

Naval Recruiting and Training Agency

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency for 1997–98. [12208]

Dr. Reid: The chief executive of the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency has been set the following key targets for 1997–98:

1. *Recruiting and initial training:* To deliver personnel to the trained strength—or to other training organisations—within 10 per cent. variance from the tasked requirement;
2. *Customer satisfaction:* To obtain a customer satisfaction rating of at least 83 per cent.
3. *Career and pre-joining training:* To maintain success rates of 95 per cent. in career training, and 97 per cent. in examined pre-joining training.
4. *Royal naval reserve:* To increase the strength of the RNR to at least 2,950 by 31 March 1998.
5. *Resources:* To retain tasked capacity while operating NRTA within its cash provision.
6. *Competing for quality:* To achieve net benefits of £4.5 million from the partnering arrangement with Flagship Training Ltd.
7. *Management information and reporting:* To implement the training pipeline management information system by July 1997, to complete the information systems infrastructure project by December 1997, and to implement project capital initial capability by March 1998.
8. *HM Treasury Accounts Direction:* To include satisfactory dummy auditable accounts in the agency annual report for financial year 1996–97, in preparation for meeting the Treasury accounts direction for financial year 1997–98.

Disposal Sales Agency

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Disposal Sales Agency for 1997–98. [12205]

Mr. Spellar: Since its launch in October 1994, the Disposal Sales Agency has achieved over £340 million in gross sales receipts and has made significant efficiency savings. The following key targets set for the chief executive for this financial year have a continuing focus on receipts, for improvement in the services provided by the agency.

1. To achieve disposal sales income of £48 million from Government-to-Government sales of surplus capital equipment and stores.
2. To achieve disposal sales income of £30 million from commercial sales of MOD's surplus items.
3. To offer the agency's disposal service to the wider public sector market to secure £2 million in sales income on behalf of new non-MOD customers.
4. To expand the agency's disposal services to cover waste disposal for MOD and the wider public sector market—to undertake market research, selection of approved contractors and the placement of appropriate contracts by 31 March 1998.
5. To introduce new agency information technology systems and trial link to IT storage and marketing contractor by 30 September 1997.
6. To secure investors in people accreditation by 31 March 1998.
7. To achieve key targets and other management actions within cash budgetary allocation of £3.5 million.

Regimental Museums

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the public funding of regimental museums. [7114]

Mr. Spellar: The funding of regimental and corps museums was reviewed in 1995. This led to a decision to reduce the funds allocated to museum operation by 12.7 per cent. from April 1998. Since then, an Army museums panel has been constituted whose responsibilities include reviewing the allocation of public funds that are applied to the operation of regimental and corps museums.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he or his Department have had with the Department of National Heritage concerning attracting a wider range of sources of funding for regimental museums. [7115]

Mr. Spellar: An Army museums panel has been established with responsibility for guiding policy for regimental and corps museums. The panel includes representation from the Museums and Galleries Commission, and the Department of National Heritage. The panel as a whole considers opportunities for alternative sources of funding including bids to the heritage lottery fund. Three regimental museums have so far obtained HLF funding.

Army Personnel

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what figure for personnel in the Army will be used as the benchmark under the current defence review. [11088]

Dr. Reid: The strategic defence review will decide upon the size and structure of the Army in accordance with what is needed to meet our nation's interests and commitments. There is no benchmark figure for the strength of the Army in relation to the review.

Mr. Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he has taken to retain, recruit and re-enlist service personnel to fill vacancies in the Army. [11087]

Dr. Reid: The Army has a number of initiatives in place to ensure that personnel of the right quality are retained in the service in sufficient numbers. This includes retention bonuses to target specific groups of soldiers where retention problems have been identified, for example in the Household Cavalry, the Royal Armoured Corps, the Royal Artillery and the infantry. In addition, re-enlistment bounties are available to ex-regular soldiers in the above regiments and corps who agree to rejoin the active list. A recruiting bounty is also payable to serving soldiers in the arms with particular recruiting difficulties, who sponsor a recruit to join their regiment or corps.

Recruiting for the Army is a continuous process, but from time to time, campaigns are undertaken to target specific population groups. At the present moment, there is an enhanced summer advertising campaign in progress, which is aimed at 16 and 17-year-olds who have just left school. Other measures planned and approved are the Army Foundation college, due to open in September 1998, and the Scotland school leavers scheme, due to begin its first course in January 1998. This scheme is a short-term measure to address the acute manpower shortages in the Scottish infantry. Both these schemes are aimed at 16-year-old school leavers and will provide a good grounding in core skills in the NVQ/SCOTVEC schemes, as well as basic military training. In addition, I have approved the retention of 41 high street Army careers information offices until at least 2000. Further measures are being considered.

Mark 2 Chinook

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what problems have been reported to his Department with the mark 2 Chinook helicopter since 1993. [11203]

Mr. Spellar: We regularly receive service bulletins from the manufacturers of the aircraft and its engines which identify potential, or actual, technical problems. Appropriate action is taken to respond to this advice. No major problems have been reported since the aircraft entered service with the RAF in November 1993.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what trials his Department is conducting to investigate the operational safety of the mark 2 Chinook. [11201]

Mr. Spellar: All trials are aimed at ensuring that an aircraft is safe for operational use. For the Chinook HC Mk2, flight trials are currently taking place, or are planned, to extend the operational capability of the aircraft within the manufacturer's cleared flight envelope and to evaluate new equipments.

Injured Service Personnel

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel in the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Navy and *(c)* RAF have invalided out due to injuries received during non-combatant duties in the last 10 years. [10433]

Dr. Reid: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Royal Navy*	*Army*	*Royal Air Force*
1987	64	121	12
1988	57	160	29
1989	70	182	18
1990	36	132	16
1991	21	55	17
1992	24	122	18
1993	26	139	12
1994	64	213	23
1995	98	390	46
1996	106	482	59

1. Figures are for calendar years and are as at 25 July 1997.
2. Army figures include Gurkhas.

Service Colleges

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost is *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* as a percentage of the annual defence budget of (i) amalgamating the Royal naval college Greenwich and the Army staff college Camberley, and (ii) establishing and running the Joint Service Command and Staff College at Bracknell until its move to a permanent site at Watchfield, Wiltshire. [8192]

Dr. Reid: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Press Releases

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much her Department spends on biking press releases to *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* other individuals or groups, each time her Department issues a press release; how many such press releases were issued by her Department (i) in the period 1 May to 1 July and

(ii) in the period 1 January to 1 March; and if she will review her Department's use of couriers to deliver press releases and investigate the possibility of using fax or e-mail. [8815]

Mr. Field *[holding answer 17 July 1997]:* The Department of Social Security's press releases are made available to hon. Members and to the media via the Central Office of Information's news distribution service. NDS's delivery mechanisms include a newswire service which, among others, supplies press releases to the parliamentary online information service, which can be accessed by all Members of Parliament and peers, hand deliveries, fax and postal services, online databases and a widely accessed world wide web site.

These methods are used either singly or in combination to ensure the most cost-effective methods are used to reach the relevant target audiences and to suit the nature of the documents—for example, whether press releases are dispatched on their own, or accompanied by reports, consultation documents and so on. No separate costing is available for the hand delivery service alone.

The Department also runs its own mailing list for press releases for organisations such as welfare rights and charities. This is a postal service.

The number of press releases issued from 1 May to 1 July was 52 and from 1 January to 1 March was 66.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances *(a)* carers can claim invalid care allowance about the age of 65 years and *(b)* eligible carers below the age of 65 years can postpone their receipt of invalid care allowance until they reach the age of 65 years or above. [10857]

Mr. Denham: The Government recognise the valuable contribution made by carers to providing community care. Benefit provision is aimed at helping to maintain the income of someone who gives up the opportunity of full-time work to provide care on a regular and substantial basis to a severely disabled person.

One of the qualifying conditions for invalid care allowance is, therefore, that a person has not attained pensionable age. Payments of ICA may continue beyond age 65, if entitlement was established before that age. There is no provision for people to postpone receipt of the benefit.

We are committed to a review with the objective of reducing poverty and welfare dependency and promoting work incentives. Provision for disabled people and their carers will form part of that review.

Employee Relocation Allowances

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to extend the scope of national insurance contributions to employee relocation allowances. [12159]

Mr. Denham: As part of looking for areas in which tax and national insurance could be brought closer together, it has become necessary to examine the national insurance liability of some relocation expenses. Subject to Parliament's approval of regulations, from 6 April 1998, national insurance contributions will be collected on those relocation allowances that do not qualify for tax relief.

In the large majority of cases, national insurance contributions are currently not collected on the relocation allowances paid by employers. By comparison, some allowances do not qualify for any tax exemption whatsoever, while some do. For example, the allowances on which tax is payable include those for additional housing costs incurred if the employee moves to a higher cost area. Other allowances such as legal and estate agents' fees, stamp duty and removal expenses are exempt from tax up to a maximum of £8,000 for each relocation.

This change will bring the two systems closer together over these payments while recognising the important differences between them. The new rules will exclude from national insurance contributions only those allowances that could qualify for tax relief as listed in tax legislation.

This is a fairer way of dealing with the national insurance position on these allowances which are paid to the approximately 120,000 employees who receive help from their employers in work-related moves every year.

The extra revenue to the national insurance fund will amount to about £50 million a year once the charge is fully in place. The fund pays for all contributory benefits. These benefits are extremely important to the people who receive them, including some of the nation's poorest pensioners, and we must ensure that employers and employees pay their fair share.

To assist employers with relocations already planned, these changes will not affect employees who start a job in a new location before 6 April 1998 or their employers. The current treatment will continue to apply for all their relocation payments.

Office Refurbishment

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has for the refurbishment of ministerial offices in her Department; and what is the estimated cost of the works and date of completion. [11876]

Mr. Field: There are currently no plans for refurbishing ministerial offices in this Department.

Pensions Review

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the Government's review of pension provision will include *(a)* occupational and *(b)* personal pensions. [11821]

Mr. Denham: The Government are committed to support and strengthen the existing framework for occupational pensions, and to create a new framework of secure, flexible and value-for-money stakeholder pensions for those who do not have the opportunity of contributing to a second pension, either because they lack the resources or because they do not have access to a decent second scheme. We also recognise that personal pensions, appropriately regulated, will remain a good option for many.

The review of the central areas of insecurity for elderly people announced on 17 July by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will include all aspects of the basic state pension and its value and second pensions, including occupational pensions, personal pensions and state earnings-related pension scheme.

Benefits Agency (Leeds Offices)

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) for how many hours each Benefits Agency office within the Leeds metropolitan district was open for advice to members of the public during a full working week in May 1997; and what were the comparable figures for May 1996; [10671]

(2) what was the average number of visits by members of the public at each Benefits Agency office in the Leeds metropolitan district during the period April to June 1997; and what were the comparable figures for April to June 1996. [10672]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We will streamline services to provide better, simpler more efficient services to claimants and other customers. Queries on operational matters are for the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, Peter Mathison. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John Gunnell, dated 29 July 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the Benefits Agency offices within the Leeds Metropolitan District.

The information available is shown in the attached tables. The BA district in Leeds has offices at Leeds East, North, North-West, South and West. There has been a BA presence, offering advice and information to unemployed customers, in Employment Service Jobcentres since the introduction of Job Seekers Allowance in October 1996.

The caller offices in Otley, Rothwell and Morley were closed on 31 Janaury 1997 and the opening hours in Leeds East, South and West were
extended on 24 February 1997.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefits agency Leeds district office opening hours

	May 1996	*May 1997*
Branch offices		
Leeds East	35½	36
Leeds South	35½	36
Leeds West	35½	36
Leeds North West	36	36
Leeds North	36	36
Caller offices		
Otley	13	—
Rothwell	30	—
Morley	31¼	—
Employment service jobcentres		
Otley	—	36
Rothwell	—	35
Morley	—	35½
Guiseley	—	36
Pudsey	—	37
Seacroft	—	36
Stanningley	—	36
Hunslet	—	36½
Dysons	—	36½
Eastgate	—	36½

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Average number of visits from public in the benefits agency Leeds district April to June 1996 and 1997

	Average number
Callers April—June 1996	
Leeds East	5,910
Leeds South	[1]2,948
Leeds West	3,294
Leeds North West	[2]4,588
Leeds North	4,809
Callers April—June 1997	
Leeds East	[3]5,028
Leeds South	1,564
Leeds West	2,863
Leeds North West	3,766
Leeds North	4,819

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

[1] This figure includes callers to the Rothwell and Morley caller offices.

[2] This figure includes callers to the Otley caller office.

[3] This figure includes 1,152 BA callers to the Employment Service jobcentres.

Benefits Fraud Hotline

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer on the benefits fraud hotline of 10 July, *Official Report*, column *591*, if the weekly figure for benefit savings of £35 million relates to savings over a 12-month period; and if she will make it her policy in future answers to use the term "weekly benefit" only in circumstances where it is defined in the text. [11111]

Mr. Denham: One of our key aims is to restore confidence in the benefits system by tackling fraud and ensuring value for taxpayers' money. Questions on Benefits Agency operational matters are the responsibility of the chief executive, Peter Mathison. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 29 July 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if the weekly figure for benefit savings of £35 million, referred to in my reply dated 9 July 1997, relates to savings over a 12 month period, if she will make it her policy in future answers to use the term weekly benefit only in circumstances where it is defined in the text.

The £35 million weekly benefit savings have been generated since the launch of the Hotline on 5 August 1996 up to the end of May 1997, and relates to a ten month period. For the eleven month period up to the end of June 1997 the cumulative savings figure was £41.91 million. Weekly benefit savings are calculated by taking the difference between the amount incorrectly paid to an individual and the correct amount of benefit due, following intervention of the fraud officer. This amount is multiplied by 32. Based on research which mainly covered Income Support, 32 weeks is the average length of time a claim would have continued if the fraud had not been detected. This multiplier is currently applied to all benefits.

I apologise this was not made clear in my previous reply.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Pensions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the increase required in class 1 contribution rates in each year up to 2000–01 if the basic pension were uprated in line with average earnings, relative to the contributions required for price-uprating, assuming that other contribution rates are increased by the same percentage. [10568]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* The information is in the table.

Percentage increase in national insurance contribution rates[1]

	1998–99	*1999–00*	*2000–01*
Employee Class 1[2]	0.1	0.2	0.4
Employer Class 1 and Class 1A[2]	0.1	0.1	0.2

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Notes:

[1] Calculations are based on the 1997 Budget economic assumptions.

[2] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 0.1 per cent.

1. It has been assumed that the cost for all benefits whose rate is the same as the basic state pension, i.e. widow's benefit and the long-term rate of incapacity benefit would rise accordingly.

2. The split of rates between employee and employer contributions was achieved by considering that for an employee on average earnings for a full-time adult, the increase in contributions paid by an employee would be the same as the increase paid by the employer.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of allowing pensioners to draw their state pensions from the age of 60 years. [7547]

Mr. Denham: It is estimated that the cost of allowing all pensioners to draw their full retirement pension from age 60 would be around £9 billion a year. When changes in incapacity benefit and income-related benefits are taken into account, the net cost would be around £7 billion.

The review of pensions announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will consider all aspects of the basic state retirement pension. However, the Government have no plans to put forward proposals for lowering state pension age.

Notes:

1. Estimates are in respect of 2000–01, and are in 1997–98 prices. They assume the change takes effect from April 2000, with no phasing.

2. The expenditure effects on the national insurance fund have been estimated by the Government Actuary's Department. The income-related benefit offsets have been calculated using the 1997–98 policy simulation model based on the 1994–95 family resources survey and the 1997–98 prices, benefits and earnings levels, and calibrated to the forecasts underlying the 1997 departmental report.

3. Underlying assumptions are that everyone will claim their pension entitlement at 60, and that there will be no behavioural effects—for example, the economic activity and income other than retirement pensions of individuals in benefit units who gain remains constant.

4. Effects on national insurance contributions, rebates and tax have not been taken into account.

Lone Parents

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the effects of the reduction in income support levels for lone parents to be introduced in April 1998 on the diet and living standards of the children of lone parents remaining on income support. [10768]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Existing recipients of the lone parent rate of the family premium in income support will not be affected as the benefit changes will affect only lone parents making new claims. It is not possible to assess accurately the effect of the reduction in income support levels on the diet and living standards of the children of those lone parents who will make a new claim for income support: individual lone parents will chose to spend their income support in different ways. The best way we can help lone parents to improve significantly their living standards is to help them move into work. That is why we have set up the new deal to help them to do this. Lone parents in work are, on average, £50 a week better off than they are out of work.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations she has received from organisations representing lone parents about *(a)* the level of income support for lone parents and *(b)* the level of child benefit for lone parents; and if she will place copies of such representations in the Library. [10770]

Mr. Bradley: Representations about the proposed changes to lone parent benefits were made by a wide variety of organisations, including those representing lone parents, to the Social Security Advisory Committee; the same points have been raised in regular discussions between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and lone parent organisations. These representations were reflected in the Social Security Advisory Committee's report, which was published on 30 July together with the Government's response as Command Paper 3713. However, lone parent organisations recognise that work offers lone parents the best way to improve their standard of living, and have welcomed the new deal for lone parents.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which her Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10744]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Department of Social Security's payroll function is carried out in-house using an integrated pay and personnel computer system. The networked system is available across the Department for the operation of payroll and personnel management through local personnel units. A database, holding details of employee accounts, shares a mainframe computer with the Department's main benefit processing systems. All DSS staff salaries are paid by the system either monthly or weekly directly into bank accounts via automated credit transfer.

Management of personnel unit operations rests separately with each individual executive agency and department headquarters. An external supplier, Harvest Ltd. has responsibility for Contributions Agency personnel operations. It was the successful bidder in a market test exercise. All other personnel operations are in-house.

Payroll support services, for all agencies, are operated by the Benefits Agency under a joint venture agreement. The central administration, technical support units and IT operations are run from the Department's Newcastle offices. The BA contracts the Information Technology Services Agency for system running, maintenance and support. ITSA in turn manages a series of contracts with external providers of IT services that cover the whole range of administration and benefits systems which the DSS operates. Payroll IT operations form a small part of these total contracts. The external service providers for the Department's IT services, including payroll, are EDS, Sema Group and Bull Systems.

The pay and personnel system is part of the Department's financial and management information system—FAMIS—which also includes its administrative accounting systems. The payroll and personnel element of FAMIS was developed entirely in house, by the BA and ITSA, over a three-year period and has been operating successfully for four years. It now supports six separate pay, grading and reward structures, one for each agency and department headquarters. The system is also responsible for tax and national insurance administration for all DSS staff.

There are no direct, on-going, co-operation arrangements in place for payroll with other Departments apart from standing arrangements for employee transfers between Departments.

Because FAMIS has been designed to support both pay and personnel functions within the Department by the use of a common data base and IT processes, it is not possible to provide costs that solely relate to payroll processing. The information in the following table relates to central business and IT process costs to support both payroll and personnel activity in the Department.

DSS expenditure on payroll 1996–97

£ million

Function	*Labour costs*	*IT costs*
Record maintenance and main payroll functions including ACT, tax and national insurance calculation and payment	1.46	1.36
Annual pay awards (6)	0.31	0.30
Business support/helpline	0.72	—
Pay re-calculation processing and appeals including recovery action on overpayments	0.84	—
Computer system support	—	0.47
Total	3.33	2.13

Mortgage Interest Claimants

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest claimants have had their benefit reduced because of non-dependent charges for those with gross weekly incomes of *(a)* less than £78, *(b)* between £78 and £115.99, *(c)* between £116 and £151.99, *(d)* between £152 and £199.99 (£152 plus for income support—jobseeker's allowance only claimants), *(e)* between £200 and £249.99 and *(f)* £250 or more. [10595]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Our objective is to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to promote work incentives. We will develop a system that supports work, savings and honesty.

Information is not yet available in relation to the income bands requested, which relate to April 1997 benefit rates. The latest information available for housing benefit is that for May 1995 and for income support mortgage interest is that for August 1996. This information is set out in the table and relates to the gross income bands in force at the relevant times.

	Number
All housing benefit cases with non-dependant deductions May 1995	136,000
Number of non-dependant deductions	140,000
Gross income < £74.00	19,000
Gross income £74.00–£110.99	26,000
Gross income £111.00–£144.99	32,000
Gross income £145.00 and over	62,000

The data refer to the number of housing benefit recipients who have non-dependants in work and the number of actual non-dependants with gross income within each band.

	Number
All income support mortgage interest cases with non-dependant deductions (August 1996)	32,000
Number of non-dependant deductions	4,000
Gross income < £76.00	29,000
Gross income £76.00–£113.99	4,000
Gross income £114.00–£149.99	4,000
Gross income £150.00 and over	8,000

Notes:

The lowest income band shown in the income support tables includes deductions made at the lowest fixed rate where the non-dependant is on income support or their gross weekly earnings have not been specified.

Sources:

1. Income support quarterly statistical inquiry August 1996.
2. Housing benefit management information system, annual 1 per cent. sample taken at the end of May 1995.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will provide a breakdown of the *(a)* age, *(b)* gender, *(c)* race and *(d)* household type of claimants who have their housing benefit or income support for mortgage interest reduced because of non-dependent charges. [10594]

Mr. Bradley: Our objective is to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to promote work incentives. We will develop a system that supports work, savings and honesty.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table. The latest date information is available for housing benefit is May 1995; for income support it is August 1996. Information on gender and race for housing benefit claimants and on race for income support mortgage interest claimants is not available.

All housing benefit recipients with non-dependent deduction—May 1995

Age of claimant	*All cases*	*Lone parent*	*Single without dependents*	*Couple with dependents*	*Couple without dependents*
All cases	[1]301,000	184,000	32,000	62,000	24,000
Under 25	5,000	3,000	1,000	—	—
25 to 59	140,000	67,000	30,000	23,000	20,000
60 and over	157,000	114,000	1,000	38,000	4,000

[1] Figure refers to the total number of housing benefit recipients with non-dependants attracting deductions.

All income support mortgage interest recipients with non-dependant deductions—August 1996

Age of claimant	*All cases*	*Lone parent*	*Single without dependants*	*Couple with dependants*	*Couple without dependants*
All cases	32,000	5,000	12,000	6,000	8,000
Under 25	—	—	—	—	—
25 to 59	23,000	5,000	8,000	5,000	5,000
60 and over	9,000	—	5,000	1,000	4,000

Male income support mortgage interest recipients with non-dependant deductions—August 1996

Age of claimant	*All cases*	*Lone parent*	*Single without dependants*	*Couple with dependants*	*Couple without dependants*
All cases	17,000	1,000	3,000	5,000	8,000
Under 25	—	—	—	—	—
25 to 59	12,000	—	3,000	5,000	4,000
60 and over	5,000	—	1,000	1,000	4,000

Female income support mortgage interest recipients with non-dependant deductions—August 1996

Age of claimant	*All cases*	*Lone parent*	*Single without dependants*	*Couple with dependants*	*Couple without dependants*
All cases	14,000	5,000	9,000	—	1,000
Under 25	—	—	—	—	—
25 to 59	10,000	5,000	5,000	—	—
60 and over	4,000	—	4,000	—	—

Note:

Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand and may not sum due to rounding.

Sources:

1. Income support quarterly statistical inquiry, August 1996.
2. Housing benefit management information system, annual 1 per cent. sample inquiries taken at the end of May 1995.

Social Security Benefits

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the numbers and proportion of unemployed persons who are not in receipt of any social security benefit. [10434]

Mr. Keith Bradley: In 1995–96, there were on average about 600,000 persons who were unemployed and not receiving any social security benefit excluding child benefit. This represents about one in four of the total number of persons unemployed. Approximately 70 per cent. of these had working partners or shared a household containing at least one working person.

The Government believe that work is the best form of welfare for people of working age. Our welfare-to-work objectives are to provide work incentives, reduce poverty and welfare dependency and strike a new balance between responsibilities and rights.

Note:

An approximation to the International Llabour Organisation definition of unemployed was used.

Cervical Spondylosis

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations she has received in respect of making cervical spondylosis an industrial disease in respect of train drivers and if she will make a statement. [10652]

Mr. Denham: No such representations have been received.

I am advised on matters relating to the industrial injuries scheme, and in particular on the prescription of diseases, by the independent Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, which continually monitor all publications and research on occupational health matters. I understand that the council found no scientific evidence of a strong occupational link between this disease, which is common in the general population, and any particular occupation.

Widow's Benefits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for widow's benefits have been refused in the last year because the claimant's marriage was polygamous. [10290]

Mr. Denham: The Benefits Agency does not keep records of the number of claims for widow's benefits which have been rejected because the claimant's marriage was polygamous.

Sponsored Immigrants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will introduce proposals to allow sponsored immigrants to claim benefits in the event of their sponsorship agreement breaking down. [10289]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for income support have been refused since 5 February 1996 on the ground that the claimant is a sponsored immigrant. [10287]

Mr. Bradley: From May 1996 to April 1997, 129 claims for income support from sponsored immigrants were refused.

Source:

Clerical management statistics (not validated).

Employment Advertisements

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how often since 1992 her Department has been responsible for employment advertisements which contained age restrictions upon those who could apply. [9510]

Mr. Denham: Records of recruitment exercises are available only as far back as 1994. The Department has not used aged restrictions in employment advertisements at any time sine 1994 but in practice does not recruit staff over age 60. This is because the normal retirement age for most grades in DSS is age 60.

Disability Living Allowance

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to enable the disabled to enter part-time employment without loss of the mobility component of disability living allowance. [10398]

Mr. Denham: Work is the best form of welfare for people of working age. Disabled people in receipt of disability living allowance can work either full or part-time with no loss of benefit.

Local Exchange Trading Systems

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer on 26 June, *Official Report*, column *640*, regarding the role of local exchange trading systems in areas of high employment, what are the benefit rules relating to the treatment of LETS; and if she will make a statement. [9906]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Participation in a local exchange trading system scheme is regarded as work for the purposes of jobseeker's allowance and income support. The credits received are taken into account as actual earnings. Family credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit treat LETS credits in same way.

Neither jobseeker's allowance nor income support are payable to people who work for, on average, 16 hours or more a week—24 hours for partners of people receiving income-based jobseeker's allowance or income support.

Where a person spends less than 16 hours a week on LETS activities, the credits are taken into account as earnings subject to the appropriate disregard—normally £5 a week. Any expenses wholly and exclusively defrayed for the purposes of the LETS activity, together with an amount in respect of tax and national insurance contributions, can also be deducted from the earnings.

People claiming unemployment-related benefits must also continue to satisfy the labour market requirements of being available for and actively seeking work. Under jobseeker's allowance, people must normally be available for a minimum of 40 hours a week, but can stipulate their own pattern of availability with the employment officer—within reasonable limits. For jobseekers participating in LETS, this means that they must either be prepared to give up the LETS work to take up a full-time job, or be able to move the LETS activities to avoid any conflict; or be available in accordance with a pattern of work which gives them reasonable prospects of securing employment, while avoiding conflict with their LETS activities.

Civil Servants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many civil servants there are in total on each payband in her Department. [9585]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is in the tables.

Senior civil service (including pay range for permanent secretaries)

Pay band	*Number of staff*
£38,760–£60,890	54
£42,740–£68,540	20
£47,120–£77,110	7
£52,020–£86,700	16
£57,020–£91,800	3
£62,420–£97,210	1
£68,340–£102,940	4
£74,660–£109,040	0
£81,600–£115,570	1
£91,800–£157,590	1

Benefits agency		*Contributions agency*		*Information technology services agency*		*War pensions agency*	
Pay band	*Number of staff*	*Pay band*	*Number of staff*	*Pay band*	*Number of staff*	*Pay band*	*Number of staff*
£6,943–£13,474	58,762	£7,150–£16,300	2,779	£8,261–£18,711	1,394	£7,217–£13,628	872
£11,895–£18,053	18,729	£9,450–£22,350	5,577	£17,111–£27,711	701	£11,663–£18,321	305
£15,147–£27,118	2,721	£15,650–£29,600	540	£26,211–£50,607	99	£15,986–£30,246	42
£25,343–£58,377	420	£23,200–£54,300	47			£25,466–£50,972	6

Child support agency		*DSS headquarters*		*Independent statutory bodies*	
Pay range	*Number of staff*	*Pay range*	*Number of staff*	*Pay range*	*Number of staff*
£7,150–£11,350	1,509	£7,279–£11,759	187	£7,279–£11,759	409
£9,050–£13,900	5,007	£9,222–£14,404	342	£9,222–£14,404	457

Child support agency		DSS headquarters		Independent statutory bodies	
Pay range	Number of staff	Pay range	Number of staff	Pay range	Number of staff
£11,550–£22,600	2,173	£11,755–£22,523	395	£11,755–£22,523	210
£15,800–£27,700	363	£14,074–£26,349	351	£16,140–£26,349	138
£19,750–£32,600	85	£20,187–£32,058	129	£20,187–£32,058	25
£25,250–£41,750	26	£26,677–£43,933	185	£26,677–£43,933	8
£28,800–£51,050	8	£27,278–£53,669	58	£27,278–£53,669	1

1. Where national and London pay bands exist the national scale has been used to determine the minimum and the London scale the maximum.
2. Pay bands have not been introduced in the Child Support Agency, DSS headquarters or the independent statutory bodies; their tables show pay ranges for civil service grades.
3. Figures for the senior civil service are additional to those shown elsewhere.
4. Includes all staff on payroll as at 17 July 1997.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what percentage of employees, in each payband, in the quangos for which her Department is responsible, are of *(a)* Asian origin and *(b)* Afro-Caribbean origin. [9584]

Mr. Bradley: The information is in the tables.

Number and percentage

Payband	Number of employees of Asian origin	Number of employees of Afro-Caribbean origin
Independent tribunal service		
£11,544–£17,869	3 (2.97)	4 (3.96)
£9,041–£13,546	9 (2.71)	13 (3.93)
£7,136–£11,439	10 (3.7)	13 (4.81)
Central adjudication services		
£7,279–£10,989	1 (7.69)	1 (7.69)
Pensions ombudsman		
£19,791–£27,394	1 (10)	0
£11,544–£17,869	1 (50)	0
£9,041–£13,546	2 (67)	1 (33)
£7,464–£11,439	1 (100)	0
Occupational pensions regulatory authority		
£15,824–£22,351	2 (8.33)	0

Income Support

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what evidence she has obtained of work disincentives for people on income support seeking *(a)* part-time work and *(b)* full-time work topped-up by family credit; and if she will make a statement. [8198]

Mr. Keith Bradley: A number of studies have been carried out, both by the Department of Social Security and by research organisations, which have looked at possible disincentives to work, for example, studies into the effects of the unemployment and poverty traps. We have studied the findings carefully. The circumstances of lone parents seeking work, for example, were explored in the Department's research "Moving off Income Support:Barriers and Bridges", published last year and this helped develop our proposals for a new deal for lone parents. The report established that a significant obstacle for lone parents moving in to work was the cost of child care and we are addressing this with our national child care strategy and with the recently announced enhancements to the child care disregard, which are the first steps in our programme of helping parents to have access to affordable, good-quality child care if they are to balance work and family life successfully. The new deal for lone parents will be important in our continuing evaluation of barriers to work. We want to make it worth while for people to make the transition into work and ensure a fair return on extra earnings once they are in work. We believe work is the best form of welfare for people of working age.

Modernising the social security system is a key priority of the Government and Martin Taylor, chief executive of Barclays plc, has been appointed to spearhead a Whitehall task force on tax and benefits. The task force will deliver the Government's pledge to streamline and modernise the system to fulfil the objectives of promoting work incentives, reducing poverty and welfare dependency, and strengthening community and family life.

Child Support Agency

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parents with care of children currently have benefit reductions made under the Child Support Act regulations concerning penalties for failure to co-operate with the CSA; and what has been the total amount of the benefit not paid for this reason in 1997 to date. [10664]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We think it right that lone mothers should co-operate wherever possible in requesting maintenance for their children from the father.

The latest available information is from August 1996, which shows that around 16,000 parents with care in receipt of income support were subject to a benefit reduction for failure to co-operate with the Child Support Agency without good reason. It is not yet possible to assess the total amount of benefit withheld since April this year but, over 1997–98 as a whole, it is estimated that the value of reduced benefit directions in income support will be around £15 million

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much extra the Child Support Agency is budgeting to spend on its telephone operations in 1997–98. [7559]

Mr. Bradley: We expect the Child Support Agency to provide an efficient and effective service to all its clients throughout the child support assessment process. We are looking for substantial and sustained operational improvements from the agency, in particular on getting more maintenance paid, reducing the backlog and improving customer service.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Mr. Nick Gibb, dated 29 July 1997

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency budget for telephone operations during 1997–98.

At the present time access to the Agency can be made by means of the National Enquiry Line, Client Helplines, or by direct dial to Child Support Officers in the Child Support Agency Centres and associated Field Offices.

The National Enquiry Line occupies a central location and is available to anyone who has a general enquiry about the Agency. The Agency has a target for answering general enquiries under its Charter Standards: we aim to answer enquiries within 20 seconds during normal working hours. Performance against this standard was 64 per cent. during 1996–97.

A Client Helpline is available in each of the six Centres to deal with clients' case specific enquiries. The Agency has had no target which covers this area, but it is clear that this is an area where the service offered by the Agency has not fully met its customers needs and we are currently looking at the definition of the targets.

I am committed to improving this and plans are in place to improve the service. In 1996–97 the Agency spent £2.2 million on running costs for its telephone system; it is anticipated that £2.7 million will be spent in 1997–98. Overall, the Agency focus is on providing a more efficient and accessible telephone service for clients making best use of its existing resources.

The Agency plans to employ staff to work a wider more flexible range of working patterns over six days a week. This will provide more opportunities for customers to contact the Agency and vice versa, and will enable the Agency to deliver a better standard of customer service through greater use of the telephone. The Agency has also recently initiated an Early Positive Customer Contact project which will increase the use of the telephone by Agency staff at an early stage in our dealings with customers. The aim is that much more of our business will be conducted over the telephone rather than by correspondence, giving customers more opportunity to raise any issues or concerns earlier than at present.

I am very conscious that there are still far too many justified complaints about the standards of basic customer contact and the service we provide. Over the next few years, I am committed to bringing high quality levels of performance to every part of our operation as a matter of routine, thereby reducing the number of complaints received and enhancing the public perception of the Agency.

I hope this is helpful.

Benefit Claimant Inquiries

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which companies have been contracted by the Benefits Agency to handle queries from claimants in the London region in respect of delays in responding to claimants' inquiries. [9173]

Mr. Keith Bradley: One of our key aims is to improve the service provided to claimants and other customers and, where appropriate, by awarding contracts. The current policy on the criterion against which contracts are awarded to companies following tender exercises is value for money. Both quality and whole-life cost are taken into account.

No companies have been contracted by the Benefits Agency to handle queries from claimants in the London region in respect of delays to customers' inquiries. Queries on operational issues are for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. John McDonnell, dated 29 July 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking which companies have been contracted by the Benefits Agency (BA) to handle queries from claimants in the London region in respect of delays in responding to claimants' enquiries.

No companies have been contracted by the BA to handle queries from customers in the London region in respect of delays in responding to customers' enquiries.

Contracts in the London region have been awarded for post opening, switchboard operations, security and general facilities management. Where switchboard operations have been contracted out, the company is responsible for directing the telephone calls to the appropriate section. Only BA staff respond to customers' enquiries.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Pensions and Overseas Benefits Directorate

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how long it takes the pensions and overseas branch to process claims for *(a)* retirement pensions from those claiming in (i) India, (ii) Pakistan, (iii) Bangladesh, (iv) Australia, (v) South Africa and (vi) Jamaica. [10293]

Mr. Denham: One of our key aims is to improve the service provided to claimants and other customers. Queries on Benefits Agency operational matters are the responsibility of Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 29 July 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how long it takes the Pensions and Overseas Benefits Directorate to process claims for Retirement Pension and Widow's Benefit for those claiming in (i) India, (ii) Pakistan, (iii) Bangladesh, (iv) Australia, (v) South Africa and (vi) Jamaica.

The information is not available in the format requested as statistics are not available by individual country. Such information as is available is shown in the table below:

Year ending 31 March 1997	*Target*	*Achievement*
Retirement pension	65 per cent. in 95 days	76 per cent.
	95 per cent. in 300 days	97 per cent.
Widows benefit	65 per cent. in 185 days	83 per cent.
	95 per cent. in 640 days	98 per cent.

The Pensions and Overseas Benefits Directorate handles claims from customers living in over 230 countries around the world. These claims can take longer to clear than their Great Britain counterparts because confirming life event details, such as births, marriages and deaths, is often not straightforward and documentation which is readily available in the UK can take longer to obtain from other countries.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what recent representations she has received regarding the all-work test; [9776]

(2) what response the Government have made to the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux report published in March entitled, "An Unfit Test". [9775]

Mr. Denham: A number of representations have been received regarding the incapacity benefit all-work test from groups representing disabled people, other interested organisations and individuals affected. I have also seen the recent report by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. Some important issues have been raised which will be considered in the context of the general review of social security. Our aim is to provide a system that helps those who can to become financially independent, and focus support on those who cannot.

It is important that the test for incapacity benefit commands confidence as a fair system that appropriately assesses whether an individual is capable of work for benefit purposes.

HEALTH

Private Sector NHS Expenditure

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish a breakdown of the £500 million spent by health authorities and trusts with the private sector; [6833]

(2) if he will give a breakdown of expenditure by health authorities and trusts in the private sector in the last year for which figures are available. [11028]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Insulin Pen Needles

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's current policy concerning charges for the provision of diabetic needles by *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* health authorities and trusts; what guidance it provides about such charges; and if that policy and guidance are under review. [9559]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 22 July 1997]:* If a general practitioner prescribes, as part of general medical services, a diabetic needle that is listed for the purposes of section 41 of the National Health Service Act 1977, it will be dispensed as part of pharmaceutical services and will attract a prescription charge. The same is true for needles issued to hospital out-patients on prescription by hospital doctors. Under the National Health Services (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) Regulations 1989, as amended, people with diabetes mellitus—except where treatment is by diet alone—are exempt from all prescription charges, including any which would relate to the prescribing of needles.

If a general practitioner himself provides diabetic needles to a patient as part of general medical services, he can make no charge. Likewise, under section 1 of the 1977 Act, health authorities and trusts must not charge for services and equipment, except where the legislation expressly indicates that a charge should be made. In all other cases, including diabetic needles, where a health authority or trust—taking account of resources, needs and clinical priorities locally—decides that a piece of equipment should be provided as part of national health service treatment, it should be provided free of charge. The Department of Health reminded health authorities and trusts of this in executive letter EL(92)20, issued in March 1992. The policy on provision of equipment by the national health service has not changed since then and is still under consideration.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 July, *Official Report*, column *414*, on GP prescribing of insulin pen needles, what matters *(a)* have so far been considered and *(b)* remain to be considered in his review of insulin pen prescription; and if he will make a statement. [10473]

Mr. Milburn: All relevant aspects of this issue are being considered.

Bad Debt

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amounts of bad debt and claims abandoned for each health authority in each region broken down by category for the last five years. [10423]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Medical Negligence

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list of trusts in each region which *(a)* have and *(b)* have not subscribed to the clinical negligence scheme for trusts, indicating the cost of each annual premium. [10410]

Mr. Milburn: The latest information will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the incidence of NHS trusts and health authorities rearranging their provisions for medical negligence in seeking to meet the costs of closing deficits by the end of the current financial year; and what restrictions he intends to introduce. [11136]

Mr. Milburn: No such estimate has been made.

National health service trusts and health authorities are expected to make provision in their annual accounts for clinical negligence claims in accordance with directions issued by the Secretary of State. NHS trusts and health authorities in managing their finances should plan for future settlement of claims and ensure that funds are in place for this purpose.

Surplus Property

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS surplus properties are currently occupied and utilised by NHS trusts; and what is their value. [10419]

Mr. Milburn: About 240 properties which are expected to become surplus over the next 10 years, and which have been retained by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, are currently occupied by national health service trusts. These properties, managed by the NHS executive's regional offices, form part of the future land sales programme, and have an approximate open market value of £450 million.

Health Visitors and District Nurses

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representation he has received about the extension of direct employment by GPs of health visitors and district nurses; and what plans he has to consult the relevant professional organisations in respect of this trend. [10484]

Mr. Milburn: The personal medical services pilot scheme enables different models of contracting to be developed and tested by nurses, health visitors and general practitioners. At present, those members of the national health service family who wish to enter into a personal medical services pilot from 1 April 1998 are invited to submit an application to their health authority by 1 November. We have discussed the implementation of the personal medical services pilots with all the relevant professional organisations and have asked officials to continue working closely with them.

Loughborough General Hospital

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the successful completion of a private finance initiative project to replace Loughborough's general hospital; and if he will make a statement. [10555]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service Executive is expecting to receive a revised full business case from Fosse Health NHS trust for the scheme to replace Loughborough's general hospital under the private finance initiative in autumn 1997. The FBC will then be considered for approval.

As a "small-scale" scheme—within NHS executive regional office delegated limits of £10 million—this scheme will not be affected by the prioritisation exercises for the major acute schemes announced on 3 July.

Heart Bypass Surgery

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been referred for heart bypass surgery in each health authority in the last three years. [10662]

Mr. Boateng: The latest available figures show the number of heart bypass operations carried out in each health authority which has a cardiac surgical unit, during the years 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95. The tables show this information. Information on patients referred for treatment is not collected and data for actual treatment received are collected retrospectively.

Estimated number of Finished Consultant Episodes (FCEs), where main operation K40-K44 (OPCS4R code) was performed, by Health authority of treatment, NHS hospitals, England 1994–95

	Number
A32 Tees DHA	96
A35 Newcastle and North Tyneside DHA	782
B11 East Riding DHA	586
B61 Leeds DHA	478
C03 Leicestershire DHA	730
C12 Sheffield DHA	943
DO1 Cambridge DHA	1
D09 Huntingdon DHA	1,122
E09 Hillingdon DHA	686
E20 Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow DHA	391
E21 Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster DH	1,335
F35 East London and The City DHA	2,389
F37 Camden and Islington DHA	635
G24 Bexley and Greenwich DHA	412
G26 South East London DHA	1,108
H07 Mid Downs DHA	1
H17 Merton Sutton and Wandsworth	265
J22 Southampton and South-west Hampshire HC	831
K41 Oxfordshire DHA	739
L10 Bristol and District DHA	548
M07 North Staffordshire DHA	435
M17 Coventry DHA	840
M25 South Birmingham DHA	611
N21 Liverpool DHA	804
P20 North West Lancashire DHA	82
P26 Manchester DHA	286
England	17,136

Notes:

Data in this table are grossed for both covered and unknown/invalid clinical data.

The following operation codes have been used:

K40 Saphenous vein graft replacement of coronary artery.

K410 Other autograft replacement of coronary artery.

K42 Allograft replacement of coronary artery.

K43 Prosthetic replacement of coronary artery.

K44 Other replacement of coronary artery.

Source:

Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES).

Estimated number of finished consultant episodes (FCEs), where main operation K40–K44 (OPCS4R code) was performed, by health authority of treatment, NHS hospital, England—1993–94

	Number
A03 South Tees DHA	29
A13 Newcastle DHA	758
B11 East Riding DHA	608
B61 Leeds DHA	671
C03 Leicestershire DHA	732
C12 Sheffield DHA	677
D09 Huntingdon DHA	852
E09 Hillingdon DHA	634
E21 Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster DH	601
F35 East London and City DHA	924
F37 Camden and Islington DHA	507
G11 Greenwich DHA	417
G26 South East London	1,356
H12 Wandsworth DHA	708
J22 Southampton and SW Hants DHA	709
K41 Oxfordshire DHA	799
L10 Bristol and District DHA	479
M07 North Staffordshire DHA	412
M17 Coventry DHA	852
M25 South Birmingham DHA	658
N21 Liverpool DHA	701
P02 Blackpool, Wyre, Fylde DHA	75
P11 Central Manchester DHA	57
P12 South Manchester DHA	176
T05 National Heart and Lung Hospital	1,069
T07 Hammersmith and Queen Charlottes	400
England	15,863

Notes:

Data in this table are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.

The following operation codes have been used:

K40 Saphenous vein graft replacement of coronary artery.

K41 Other autograft replacement of coronary artery.

K42 Allograft replacement of coronary artery.

K43 Prosthetic replacement of coronary artery.

K44 Other replacement of coronary artery.

Source:

Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES).

Estimated number of Finished Consultant Episodes (FCEs), where main operation K40–K44 (OPCS4R code) was performed, by Health authority of treatment, NHS hospitals, England—1992–93

	Number
A04 East Cumbria DHA	1
A13 Newcastle DHA	809
B13 East Yorkshire Health Authority	629
B61 Leeds DHA	460
C03 Leicestershire Health Authority	627
C08 Nottingham DHA	3
C12 Sheffield DHA	460
D09 Huntingdon DHA	565
E08 Harrow DHA	1
E09 Hillingdon DHA	603
E14 Riverside DHA	1
E17 Parkside DHA	330
F10 The City and Hackney DHA	460
F12 Tower Hamlets DHA	604
F22 Bloomsbury and Islington DHA	414
G11 Greenwich DHA	465
G13 West Lambeth DHA	566
G14 Camberwell DHA	124
G15 Lewisham and North Southwark DHA	477
H12 Wandsworth DHA	759
J10 Dorset DHA	1
J22 Southampton and South-west Hampshire DHA	648
K41 Oxfordshire DHA	713
L10 Bristol and District DHA	456
M07 North Staffordshire DHA	348
M17 Coventry DHA	759
M25 South Birmingham DHA	575
N21 Liverpool DHA	605
P02 Blackpool Wyre and Fylde DHA	211
P11 Central Manchester DHA	52
P12 South Manchester DHA	268
T05 National Heart and Lung Hospital	1,041
T07 Hammersmith and Queen Charlottes	454
England	14,488

Notes:

Data in this table are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.

The following operation codes have been used:

K40 Saphenous vein graft replacement of coronary artery.

K41 Other autograft replacement of coronary artery.

K42 Allograft replacement of coronary artery.

K43 Prosthetic replacement of coronary artery.

K44 Other replacement of coronary artery.

Source:

Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES).

Heart Disease

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each health authority, the numbers of those suffering from heart disease who are *(a)* male and *(b)* female in the most recent 12–month period. [10661]

Ms Jowell: The only accurate information on heart disease relates to death rates rather than to numbers of those affected. Tables and graphs showing the latest mortality rates from coronary heart disease by health authority are contained in the Public Health Common Data Set for England 1996, volume 1, copies of which are available in the Library.

However, in the 1994 health survey for England, one quarter of the people interviewed considered themselves to have some form of cardiovascular disorder, and 6 per cent. of men and 4 per cent. of women reported having had a heart attack or angina.

Oral Contraceptives

Mr. Singh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many teenage girls have suffered adverse medical consequences as a result of being prescribed oral contraceptives in each of the last five years. [10486]

Mr. Milburn: The information available from the yellow card scheme for adverse reaction reporting is shown in the table. The scheme is voluntary for doctors, dentists, coroners and hospital pharmacists and not all adverse drug reactions are reported. A report of a suspected adverse drug reaction does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the drug, other factors may be contributory.

Numbers of suspected adverse reactions reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines from 1 Janaury 1992 to 31 December 1996 in teenage girls prescribed oral contraceptives in the United Kingdom

Year	*Number of adverse drug reaction reports*[1] *in teenage girls where an oral contraceptive was a suspect drug*
1992	36
1993	31
1994	20
1995	34
1996	22

[1] Each report relates to one patient.

Mr. Singh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is his Department's policy on the prescription of oral contraceptives to girls aged under 16 years without their parents' knowledge or consent; [10602]

(2) what guidelines his Department has issued on prescription of oral contraceptives to teenage girls under the age of 16 years; [10601]

(3) what monitoring is undertaken to ensure adherence to his Department's guidelines on the prescription of oral contraceptives to teenage girls. [10487]

Ms Jowell: In March 1986, health circular HC(86)1 was issued to health authorities giving guidance on the provision of contraceptive advice and treatment to young people under 16, and to the circumstances in which such advice and treatment can be given without parental knowledge or consent. The circular sets out the criteria upon which a doctor or health professional must be satisfied before prescribing contraception. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

The Department of Health's guidance, and professional advice produced by organisations such as the BMA, make it clear that doctors must try to persuade a young person who is unwilling to allow parents or general practitioners to be informed of the importance of doing so. The General Medical Council has also issued guidelines for GPs on this issue. We will be discussing with the health professions and voluntary sector the development of standards to build upon good practice in contraceptive advice and treatment for young people.

Care Definitions

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 July, *Official Report*, column *430*, for what reasons he is unable to define *(a)* top quality primary care *(b)* continuing care and *(c)* mental health in (i) quantitative and (ii) qualitative terms. [11054]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 8 July at column *429*, in which we defined the characteristics of top quality care.

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* cervical smear tests were performed, *(b)* abnormalities were discovered and *(c)* colposcopies were performed at the end of the last three years; and what estimate he has made of the number of lives saved as a result. [10806]

Mr. Boateng: The available information for the years 1993–94 to 1995–96—the latest available—is given in the tables. The Department of Health does not collect figures on the number of colposcopies performed.

(a) Number of cervical smears examined by pathology laboratories in England

Thousands

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Number of cervical smears examined by pathology laboratories	4,477	4,505	4,593

Source:
Form KC61.

(b) Number of abnormalities discovered

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Number of abnormal test results[1]	328	353	361

Notes:

[1] Inadequate smears are excluded. Abnormal results are all tests which did not shown as negative.

The number of deaths from cervical cancer (England) fell from 1,532 in 1992 to 1,256 in 1995 (Source: Office for National Statistics).

Source:
Form KC61.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10731]

Ms Jowell: The Department has a contract with Chessington Computer Services Ltd. to provide a full on line payroll service using the standard payment input and retrieval system. This service costs £500,000 per year. The Department's pay unit inputs all data to the system and provides an inquiry service to staff. The cost of this service in 1997–98 is £321.365.

Health Authorities (Local Accountability)

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make health authorities more accountable to local communities. [10757]

Mr. Milburn: Those appointed to serve on health authority boards, in the future, will be more representative of the community they serve. They will have to live in the area, show a commitment to the national health service and will include more users of the NHS, carers and people from the voluntary sector who can speak with a community voice.

Nominations for these posts will be sought from local authorities and local Members of Parliament as well as through advertisements to be placed in the autumn.

Essential Small Pharmacy Scheme

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the essential small pharmacies scheme on the numbers of rural pharmacies; [11151]

(2) how many pharmacies in England received payment under the essential small pharmacy scheme in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1997 broken down into (i) metropolitan boroughs, (ii) shire counties and (iii) London; [11149]

(3) what proposals he has to support rural pharmacies. [11150]

Mr. Milburn: The essential small pharmacy scheme exists to provide financial support to pharmacies located more than 1 km from the next nearest pharmacy and which dispense fewer than 18,636 national health service prescriptions in a year. Rural pharmacies can take advantage of the scheme.

The pharmacies in the scheme are split into metropolitan boroughs and shire counties as set out in the table.

	30 September 1994	*30 September 1996*
England and Wales	283	276
England	257	249
of which located in:		
Metropolitan boroughs	34	36
Shire counties	197	179
London	26	34
Wales	26	27

Community Nurses (Transport Allowance)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the uprating of transport allowances to community nurses. [11467]

Mr. Milburn: Allowances for national health service staff on national terms and conditions of service are set by the General Whitley Council for the NHS which consists of management and staff side representatives,The council has no plans at present to increase these allowances, which are reviewed annually.

Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the level of health expenditure at current prices in each of the regions in the United Kingdom in each year since 1979. [11165]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The figures available are shown in the tables. It is not possible to provide a regional analysis prior to 1988–89.

Health expenditure

£000

Region	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Northern	1,654,441	1,667,915	1,625,681	1,834,342	1,922,756	1,975,788
Yorkshire	1,897,024	1,908,545	1,971,506	2,082,642	2,207,164	2,254,133
Trent	2,352,359	2,370,817	2,459,676	2,586,300	2,766,696	2,889,449
East Anglian	1,020,235	1,036,598	1,080,732	1,117,149	1,177,201	1,209,022
North West Thames	2,002,319	2,008,209	2,029,999	2,207,220	2,309,131	2,345,558
North East Thames	2,363,970	2,369,077	2,388,128	2,498,782	2,582,445	2,659,714
South East Thames	2,116,228	2,116,221	2,144,195	2,323,880	2,387,509	2,437,249
South West Thames	1,703,160	1,718,522	1,691,941	1,840,442	1,917,278	1,914,335
Wessex	1,444,796	1,481,857	1,496,302	1,626,081	1,701,846	1,787,140
Oxford	1,166,629	1,180,398	1,202,070	1,308,099	1,364,260	1,381,495
South Western	1,711,902	1,744,496	1,803,272	1,907,288	1,979,662	2,061,574
West Midlands	2,628,077	2,689,836	2,800,994	2,910,973	3,039,145	3,096,282
Mersey	1,330,474	1,337,632	1,390,558	1,456,967	1,531,795	1,560,497
North Western	2,260,197	2,234,973	2,319,583	2,403,029	2,498,066	2,568,840

Health expenditure

£000

Region	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Northern and Yorkshire	4,306,507	4,457,663
Trent	2,966,426	3,081,765
Anglian and Oxford	2,893,234	3,010,874
North Thames	5,106,882	5,322,736
South Thames	4,513,941	4,769,425
South and West	4,040,864	4,161,999
West Midlands	3,264,462	3,441,572
North West	4,356,636	4,492,029

Source:

Annual accounts of regional and district health authorities (England); annual accounts of family practitioner committees 1988–89 to 1990–91) and family health services authorities (1991–92 to 1995–96) (England).

Note:

1. The latest available figures are for 1995–96.
2. The figures have been adjusted to 1997–98 prices.
3. The figures are not directly comparable across all years due to changes in the organisational structure and different accounting policies.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will circulate to each hon. Member a copy of his letter on NHS break-even duties and trust deficit three-year bridging arrangements as set out in his letter of 15 July to trust directors of finance and health authorities. [11858]

Mr. Milburn: Copies of the letter have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement of the level of health service inflation for the financial years *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97. [11045]

Mr. Milburn: The Department of Health does not calculate health service inflation.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the impact on baseline expenditure planned for the NHS in 1998–99 of the increase in its gross domestic product deflation from 2.5 per cent. to 2.75 per cent.; and what percentage this figure constitutes of the planned increase in NHS spending in 1998–99; [11043]

(2) what is the cost effect on his planned increase in NHS spending for 1998–99 of the change in the GDP deflator to 2.75 per cent. [11035]

Mr. Milburn: At the time of the November 1996 Budget, the gross domestic product deflator was forecast at 2 per cent. for 1998–99, and the previous Government planned a 0.25 per cent. real terms increase in expenditure on the national health service in England for that year. At the time of the July 1997 Budget, the Chancellor revised the gross domestic product deflator forecast to 2.75 per cent. for 1998–99.

To maintain the previous Government's planned real terms increase in national health service expenditure in 1998–99 to take account of the change in deflator would have cost £258 million. This is just 14.5 per cent. of the Chancellor's planned increase of £1,775 million in expenditure on the national health service in 1998–99 following the July Budget, which allocated an extra £1 billion to the national health service in England, giving 2.35 per cent. real terms growth.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to paragraph 5.57 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98", what are the assumptions for efficiency savings for the financial year 1998–99. [11855]

Mr. Milburn: Decisions on the allocation between programmes of the additional resources for the national health service as announced in the Budget, and the related efficiency savings, have not yet been taken.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much he expects to save by reducing the administration and management costs of running the NHS in England for the financial years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02. [11037]

Mr. Milburn: We have set targets to reduce the costs of managing the national health service by £100 million in 1997–98. This represents a significant investment into direct patient services and away from bureaucracy, in line with our commitment to ensure that more of every pound spent in the NHS goes on frontline patient services.

The NHS Executive is working with the NHS to assess the scope for further reductions in the costs of managing the NHS in 1998–99 and beyond.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will express management and administrative staff costs for the financial years *(a)* 1992–93 and *(b)* 1997–98 as a percentage of total NHS expenditure. [11041]

Mr. Milburn: Information for 1997–98 is not available. The most recent information is set out in the table.

Expenditure on the salaries and wages of general and senior managers and administration and clerical staff costs as a percentage of total revenue (HCHS) expenditure

£000

	Expenditure 1992–93 (cash prices)	*Expenditure 1992-93 (1995–96 prices)*	*Expenditure 1995–96 (cash prices)*
General and Senior Managers	497,625	534,449	789,507
Administrative and Clerical	1,506,163	1,617,619	1,643,200
Total G and S/A and C	2,003,788	2,152,068	2,432,707
Total revenue (HCHS) expenditure	21,265,487	22,839,133	23,889,923
Percentage of total HCHS spend on general and senior managers	2.3 per cent.	2.3 per cent.	3.3 per cent.
Percentage of total HCHS spend on administrative and clerical staff	7.1 per cent.	7.1 per cent.	6.9 per cent.
Percentage of total HCHS spend on general and senior managers and administrative and clerical staff	9.4 per cent.	9.4 per cent.	10.2 per cent.

Notes:

1. Salaries and Wages figures are based upon gross costs and include Employers NI and Superannuation costs.

2. The figures given are for hospital and community health services only. Family health services authorities and other health bodies are excluded as comparable figures are not collected centrally.

Source:

1. Annual financial returns of regional and district health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

2. Annual financial returns of NHS Trusts.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the effect on NHS expenditure in 1998–99 from the ending of payable tax credit to exempt institutions. [11360]

Mr. Milburn: The withdrawal of advance corporation tax credits has no effect on national health service expenditure. I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 14 July 1997, column *1*.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the additional cost to the NHS in 1998–99 of an overall pay settlement under which wages and salaries rose by 1 per cent. above the gross domestic product deflator. [11274]

Mr. Milburn: None.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the administrative cost of the internal market of the NHS in 1996–97. [11276]

Mr. Milburn: There are no official estimates of the additional costs associated with the internal market, but independent commentators have in the past suggested a figure of £1.5 billion.

The Government's job now is to ensure that effective action is taken to root out unnecessary bureaucracy to ensure that more of every pound spent in the national health service goes on front-line patient services.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what amount of his recently announced increase in NHS spending for 1998–99 will be available for capital expenditure. [11277]

Mr. Milburn: Decisions on the allocation between programmes of the additional resources for the national health service announced in the Budget have yet to be decided.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the incidence of the use of moneys from the emergency contingency funds of NHS organisations in closing the deficits by the end of the current financial year; and what restrictions he intends to introduce; [11130]

(2) what estimate he has made of the incidence of inter-trust health authority brokerage arrangements for the transfer of cash to meet the cost of closing deficits by the end of the current financial year; and what restrictions he intends to introduce; [11131]

(3) what estimate he has made of the incidence of the rescheduling of debt payments by local NHS organisations to regional NHS executive organisations in seeking to meet the cost of closing deficits by the end of the current financial year; and what restrictions he intends to introduce. [11135]

Mr. Milburn: Whatever contingency funds are kept by national health service organisations are a matter for the management of the organisations concerned.

The inter-year flexibility arrangements—otherwise known as brokerage—which apply to trusts and health authorities do not address the issue of income and expenditure deficits. Their purpose is to ensure maximum use of the cash resources made available to the NHS as a whole in the financial year. Where appropriate, the external financing limits of trusts and the cash limits of health authorities forecasting cash underspends are reduced and those of other trusts and health authorities requiring temporary in-year assistance with their cash flow are increased. These transactions are normally reversed the following year. These arrangements work well and there are no plans to restrict them.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the scale of the use of GP fundholder savings in helping health authorities and trusts meet closing of deficit requirements by the end of the current financial year; and what restrictions he intends to introduce. [11132]

Mr. Milburn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him today.

Fundholders may voluntarily return to their health authority savings which they do not wish to spend. There is no system in place to enable fundholders to give their savings to trusts to meet deficits.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the scale of the exercise and what restrictions he intends to introduce in the case of the downward revaluation of NHS assets so as to reduce the 6 per cent. return on assets requirements in seeking to meet the costs of closing deficits by the end of the current financial year by NHS trusts. [11133]

Mr. Milburn: There is no exercise under way or planned to restrict or systematically reduce the valuation of national health service assets or the requirements to make a 6 per cent. return on them. Health authority allocations and trust prices have already been set on the basis of estimated capital charges for 1997–98 and there are no plans to change them.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the incidence of, and what restrictions he intends to introduce in the case of, the use of recovery strategy by health authorities and NHS trusts that carry forward deficits for *(a)* two and *(b)* three years that would otherwise have to be terminated by the end of the current financial year. [11134]

Mr. Milburn: In the normal course of events, health authorities and trusts can be expected to run small surpluses and deficits which even out over a run of years. Health authorities and trusts which have significant financial problems are required to draw up robust recovery plans for approval and monitoring by the National Health Service Executive. These recovery plans are kept under regular review.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what expenditure is planned by each health authority on *(a)* non-NHS purchases, *(b)* extra-contractual referrals and *(c)* medical negligence claims. [10422]

Mr. Milburn: I shall write to the hon. Member in due course with such information as is available.

Melatonin

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to stop the sale of naturally occurring melatonin in health food shops; what representations he has received calling for chemical equivalents to be available on prescription; and what assessment he has made of the differences between the two products; [11629]

(2) what proposals he has for making melatonin available as a dietary supplement without prescription. [11582]

Mr. Milburn: Melatonin, whatever its source, is an unlicensed medicinal product and available in the United Kingdom only on prescription. It is not a dietary supplement and the Medicines Control Agency has taken action to prevent its unlawful sale or supply in health food shops. If an application for a marketing authorisation for melatonin as a medicinal product is received, the MCA will assess the product in accordance with the law.

Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1997

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1997. [11826]

Mr. Milburn: The Government have commissioned an independent and fundamental review of the current operations of the five statutory bodies created by the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1997—the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting and the National Boards for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting in the four countries of the United Kingdom.

Independent Advisory Panel

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the independent advisory panel has determined the methods it will use to assess services within its terms of reference; and if he will make a statement. [11046]

Mr. Milburn: The independent advisory panel has been asked to report by the end of October. We expect it to inform us at that stage of the methods that it has used to assess services. The panel is independent. We do not expect to make any statement on its work until we have had an opportunity to consider its findings.

NHS Efficiency Task Force

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the NHS efficiency task force will report; and if he will make a statement; [11059]

(2) how many meetings the NHS efficiency task force will be holding in 1997–98; [11026]

(3) how many times the national health service efficiency task force has met; [11030]

(4) if he will make a statement on the measures of efficiency which the NHS efficiency task force will use to determine whether its recommendations lead to improve patient care. [11029]

Mr. Milburn: The task force will not produce a formal report, but its initial findings are expected to be available in the autumn. The task force met on 12 June. Individual task force members will work with Ministers and officials to take forward specific areas of work. The effectiveness of the task force will be measured by the short-term savings it is able to make in the national health service without detriment to patient care.

Ministerial Absences

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for himself and each of his Ministers the dates when they plan to be absent from his Department's London office during the months of August and September. [11032]

Ms Jowell: Ministers are required to be available for Government business at all times. Subject to this overall requirement, they may take leave as and when Government business permits, and during this time a duty Minister is always available.

NHS Planning

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the targets and standards listed on pages 17 to 21 of "Priorities and Planning Guidance for the NHS 1997–98" he plans to amend. [11024]

Mr. Milburn: A new priorities and planning guidance for the NHS will be published in due course. The Government will be publishing a Green Paper in the autumn outlining proposals for the new public health strategy.

NHS Land and Buildings

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give a breakdown of the land and buildings currently owned by the NHS. [11027]

Mr. Milburn: The buildings owned by the national health service occupy around 315,750,000 sq m on around 16,500 hectares of land owned by the NHS.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the timetable of project targets for each of the major hospital PFI schemes selected to continue towards financial close under the first prioritisation exercise announced on 3 July. [11039]

Mr. Milburn: The selected private finance initiative schemes will have the objective of reaching an early and acceptable financial close over the next 18 months. Officials are now preparing programmes and milestones for these schemes.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which companies or consortiums are involved in each of the major hospital PFI schemes selected under his Department's first prioritisation exercise announced on 3 July. [11038]

Mr. Milburn: The consortiums and the constituent companies for the 14 major acute sector hospital PFI schemes selected to continue towards financial close under the first prioritisation exercise are as follows:

Trust	*Consortia*	*Constituent companies*
Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust	Pentland	Tarmac PFU Ltd. United Medical Enterprise Ltd. Tarmac Service Master Tarmac Construction Ltd.
Norfolk and Norwich Healthcare NHS Trust	Octagon Healthcare Ltd.	John Laing Group Plc Serco
North Durham Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	Consort Healthcare	Balfour Beatty Initial Healthcare Royal Bank of Scotland
South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust	United Healthcare	Taylor Woodrow Healthcare Group Total Facilities Management
Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust	Catalyst Healthcare	Bovis British Linen Bank RCO/Bovis Building Management
Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust	Health Management Group	AMEC Building and Property Facilities Management Ltd.
Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust	Mercia Healthcare Ltd.	Alfred McAlpine W. S. Atkins Gardner Merchant Norweb
Wellhouse NHS Trust	No Consortium Name	Siemens Bouygues Construction UK Bateman Healthcare Services Healthgate Ltd.
Worcester Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	Catalyst Healthcare	Bovis British Linen Bank RCO/Bovis Building Management
Bishop Auckland Hospitals NHS Trust	No Consortium Name	HCDA Shepherd Construction Ltd. Compass Bateman Siemens
South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust	Atcare	Alfred McAlpine W. S. Atkins United Utilities Sutcliffe Granada
South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	Aqumen	Shepherd Construction Ltd. Mowlem Facilities Management Ltd.
Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust	The Hospital Company	Tarmac Construction Ltd. Tarmac Servicemaster United Medical Enterprises Ltd.
Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust	United Healthcare	Healthcare Group Taylor Woodrow Total Facilities Management Initial Healthcare Services

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the time table for construction for the Dartford and Gravesham and the Norfolk and Norwich PFI hospital projects. [11040]

Mr. Milburn: The Norfolk and Norwich Healthcare national health service trust and Dartford and Gravesham NHS trust are working with their private sector partners to the following timetables for the construction of new hospitals under the private finance initiative:

	Start on site	*Completion*
Norfolk and Norwich Healthcare NHS Trust	Spring 1998	Spring 2001
Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust	August 1997	Autumn 2000

Clinical Services

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which clinical procedures currently do not meet his Department's clinical effectiveness criteria published in 1996. [11025]

Ms Jowell: The Department of Health does not maintain lists of clinical procedure which have been judged to be "effective" or "ineffective".

Health professionals must use research knowledge about potential effectiveness, their knowledge of the patient, and own professional judgment in order to decide what treatment to provide for any particular patient within their own particular circumstances. Some interventions will be appropriate for certain conditions, but inappropriate for others. The Department, in partnership with the health professions, sponsors a wide range of programmes which aim to bring forward the best possible research-based professional advice and make it available to the NHS.

The Government intend that the NHS should concentrate on the quality and success of treatment, so that effectiveness of services, and outcomes for patients, will become the standards by which we measure the performance of health services.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement listing for each health authority *(a)* the clinical services which they purchase, *(b)* the amount spent on each service and *(c)* the amount spent per patient for each clinical service purchased in the last year for which figures are available. [11031]

Mr. Milburn: Information on the national health services purchased under these headings is not held centrally.

Road Traffic Accident Costs

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional revenues he estimates will accrue to the NHS in 1997–98 from the recovery of moneys made by trusts under the terms of the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997. [11042]

Ms Jowell: None. The Road Traffic Reduction Act does not give revenue-raising powers to national health service trusts.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if income received by an NHS trust from the recoupment of road traffic accident costs is repayable to purchasing authorities. [11279]

Ms Jowell: No, but trusts must take income from this source into account when setting the prices they charge to health authorities and general practitioner fundholders.

Community Mental Health Nurses

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many community mental health nurses were employed in the NHS in each year since 1979. [10904]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The number of community mental health nurses employed by the NHS in each year since 1981—the earliest year for which figures are available—is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services nursing staff in the community psychiatric area of work[1] England, at 30 September each year

Whole time equivalents

Year	*Nursing staff in the community psychiatric area*[1]
1981	1,080
1982	1,270
1983	1,430
1984	1,880
1985	2,310
1986	2,530
1987	2,770
1988	3,080
1989	3,380
1990	3,600
1991	3,760
1992	4,210
1993	4,320
1994	4,760
1995[2]	7,980
1996[2]	10,530

Notes:

[1] Includes qualified, unqualified and other nursing staff working in the community psychiatric area of work.

[2] A new classification of non-medical NHS staff was introduced in 1995. Information based on this classification is not directly comparable with earlier years.

Figures are rounded to the neared 10 whole-time equivalents.

Source:

Department of Health non-medical work force census.

NHS Cleaning, Catering and Laundry Services

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS spent on cleaning, catering and laundry services in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1996–97. [11275]

Mr. Milburn: For England, the information requested is available only for 1993–94, as shown in table 1, as a result of decisions by Conservative Ministers. In subsequent years, expenditure on cleaning cannot be separately identified and information on catering and laundry is confined to expenditure on external contracts as contained in table 2. Data for 1996–97 are not yet available.

Table 1: Expenditure by health authorities and NHS trusts on cleaning, catering and laundry services 1993–94—England

	Total £000
Cleaning	426,745
Catering	446,219
Laundry	164,693

Table 2: Expenditure by health authorities and NHS trusts on external contract catering and laundry services—England

£000

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Catering	57,740	50,939	60,250
Laundry	24,367	30,047	34,581

Source:

1. The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.
2. The annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities, and the special health authorities of the London Postgraduate teaching hospitals.

Prescription Fraud

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish his estimates of the savings which will result from his efficiency scrutiny report into prescription fraud. [11278]

Mr. Milburn: We shall publish estimates of savings later this summer, once a full assessment of the recommendations has been completed.

Dental Services

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the spending on *(a)* NHS dentistry and *(b)* directly employed NHS community dentists for each of the last five years. [11091]

Mr. Milburn: Expenditure on general dental services, the main element of national health service dentistry, and the community dental services in England between 1992–93 and 1996–97 is given in the tables. For the CDS in 1994–95 and 1995–96, we have only information provided by NHS trusts on their expenditure on paediatric dental community services. Information for 1996–97 will not be available until the end of the year.

Table 1: General dental service: Expenditure[1] on NHS dentistry from the year ending 1992–93 to 1996–97

Expenditure on general dental services, England

£ million

Year	*Gross expenditure*	*Net expenditure*
1992–93	1,306	911
1993–94	1,222	855
1994–95	1,279	896
1995–96	1,290	908
1996–97[2]	1,323	940

[1] Figures are based on appropriation accounts (cash) data. Net expenditure shows cost after taking account of patient charge income, net of refunds.

[2] Data for 1996—97 is provisional.

Table 2: Expenditure on the community dental service from year ending 1992–93 to 1993–94

Expenditure on community dental services, England *£ million*

Year	*Expenditure*
1992–93[1]	75.8
1993–94[1]	78.5

[1] The figures include all expenditure on clinical dentists and medical anaesthetic staff together with technical dental and secretarial support staff. It also includes staff expenses, drugs, other medical supplies, and all furniture and equipment. Based on annual financial returns of regional and district health authorities, and NHS trusts.

Table 3: Expenditure on the paediatric dental community service from year ending 1994–95 to 1995–96

Expenditure on paediatric dental community service, England

£ million

Year	*Expenditure*
1994–95[1]	84.0
1995–96[1]	88.4

[1] The figures include all expenditure on surveillance, investigation and treatment of dental disease in the community. It also includes overheads. The figure excludes dental health education and costs of fluoridation.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list for himself and each of his Ministers *(a)* the official engagements, meetings and functions to which they are currently committed until the end of the year, *(b)* the dates of these engagements, *(c)* the activity the Ministers will be carrying out and *(d)* if a speech is being made; [11034]

(2) if he will publish a list of the organisations he and each of his Ministers are committed to meeting between now and the end of the year; and when these meetings will take place. [11033]

Mr. Dobson: Ministers attend a variety of meetings, throughout the year which are all subject to confirmation. It would be open to misunderstanding and therefore potentially misleading to provide provisional details of meetings which may or may not take place.

Tobacco Duty

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the health implications of the introduction of a banding of tobacco products duty related to their nicotine content; and if he will promote the introduction of such banding. [11269]

Ms Jowell: Given the recognised dangers of cigarettes, the best advice for smokers must always be to give up.

We recognise that for many this is a difficult option, and how best to limit the addictive properties of cigarettes will be considered, together with all other aspects of harm reduction, in the preparation of the Government's tobacco control strategy.

Hove General Hospital

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he was informed of the closure of Hove general hospital by Brighton Health Care NHS trust; and if he will discuss this matter with the chief executive of the trust. [10789]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The closure of Hove general hospital is part of the plan to redevelop the Royal Sussex county hospital agreed following public consultation in 1991, and approved by Ministers in March 1994. We understand that the services currently provided at the hospital will be provided from the new polyclinic in Hove and Brighton general hospital.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients waited over a year for hospital treatment in each year since 1979. [10907]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Information on patients waiting over a year for treatment on either an ordinary or day care basis at national health service hospitals in England is given in the table. The first information available for day cases was for 31 September 1987.

	Number of patients waiting more than 12 months as at 31 March:			
	Ordinary admissions	*Day cases*	*All in-patient cases*	*Total number waiting*
1979	185,195	—	—	752,422
1980	196,983	—	—	664,919
1981	180,774	—	—	628,333
1982	175,554	—	—	622,480
1983	198,546	—	—	726,186
1984	194,614	—	—	692,945
1985	171,197	—	—	674,453
1986	161,326	—	—	673,107
1987	162,273	—	—	687,945
1988	182,161	25,764	207,925	876,246
1989	193,952	29,359	223,311	922,676
1990	175,777	32,083	207,860	958,976
1991	145,109	24,652	169,761	948,243
1992	69,000	11,585	80,585	917,717
1993	45,195	11,682	56,877	994,974
1994	46,404	18,104	64,508	1,065,369
1995	21,750	10,444	32,194	1,044,051
1996	3,686	890	4,576	1,048,029
1997	20,732	10,476	31,208	1,158,004

Consultant Geriatricians

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant geriatricians were employed in the NHS in each year since 1979. [10903]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The latest available information is shown in the table.

Whole-time equivalent of hospital medical consultant geriatricians in England at 30 September each year from 1979 to 1995

Year	*Whole-time equivalent*
1979	350
1980	370
1981	390
1982	400
1983	410
1984	420
1985	440
1986	480
1987	440
1988	460
1989	470
1990	490
1991	510
1992	530
1993	550
1994	600
1995	640

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

2. Data for 1996 are not yet available. We expect to have information available in September/October.

3. The census is a snapshot at 30 September each year.

Source:

The Medical and Dental Workforce Census 30 September 1979 to 1995.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Shadow Tolling

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, column *494*, when he expects to be able to make an announcement on the outcome of the development work on shadow toll payment mechanisms. [10681]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 22 July, *Official Report*, column *494*.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, column *494*, if he will announce whether the development work on payment mechanisms for possible application to the A40 west London approach and A13 Thames gateway design, build, finance and operate projects has been successful at the same time as he announces the results of the accelerated review. [10678]

Ms Jackson: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport announced on 28 July the decisions reached on the accelerated review. As part of that statement, he announced that the A40 west London approach scheme had been cancelled and that the A13 Thames gateway DBFO would go ahead. The development work on the payment mechanisms for the A13 is not yet complete and will be announced in due course.

Rail Cancellations

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of scheduled rail services were cancelled in each year since 1979. [11359]

Ms Glenda Jackson: *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* My Department holds information relating to the last five years. Trains booked to run, and trains actually run, for the five years ending 31 March 1997 were as follows:

Year ending	*Trains booked*	*Trains run*	*Cancelled*
31 March 1993	2,827,200	2,790,400	36,800 (1.30 per cent.)
31 March 1994	3,178,600	3,141,600	37,000 (1.17 per cent.)
31 March 1995	3,183,800	3,144,800	39,000 (1.22 per cent.)
31 March 1996	3,413,900	3,374,000	39,900 (1.17 per cent.)
31 March 1997	3,558,000	3,525,600	32,400 (0.91 per cent.)

Source:

DETR. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100 trains. Figures relate to scheduled domestic passenger services only. "Cancelled" trains are those which did not run at all, and do not include trains which terminated early, omitted certain station calls, or suffered extensive delay.

Rail Network (Assaults)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what was the total number of assaults on *(a)* staff and *(b)* passengers on trains in each train operating company area in each of the last five years; [11464]

(2) what was the total number of assaults on *(a)* staff and *(b)* passengers at stations in each train operating company area in each of the last five year. [11465]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This information is not available in the format requested. However, the tables detail the number of notifiable assaults on staff and passengers on trains and at rail stations for 1994–95, 1995–96, and 1996–97, broken down by British Transport police area. Figures for previous years are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

1994–95

BTP Area	*Public*	*Staff*
London North	190	43
North East	44	15
Scotland	140	60
North West	124	29
Midlands	25	17
South West	39	9
London South	258	49
London Underground	346	88
Total	1,166	310

1995–96

BTP Area	*Public*	*Staff*
London North	175	27
North East	33	4
Scotland	118	43
North West	92	32
Midlands	26	20
South West	38	16
London South	293	46
London Underground	298	58
Total	1,073	246

1996–97

BTP Area	*Public*	*Staff*
London North	176	30
North East	59	11
Scotland	120	40
North West	91	23
Midlands	37	8
South West	42	7
London South	330	48
London Underground	266	47
Total	1,121	214

Assaults comprise grievous bodily harm, wounding and actual bodily harm offences only.

London Underground (Accidents)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* fatal, *(b)* serious and *(c)* minor injuries were suffered by (i) passengers and (ii) employees of London Underground in each of the last 10 years. [11463]

Ms. Glenda Jackson: Information for the period 1987–95 was provided in a written answer to the hon. Member on 22 Janaury 1996, *Official Report*, column *23*, based on statistics from London Underground. The reporting arrangements were changed in 1995 and statistics are no longer collected in the same manner. Information for financial year 1995–96—from "Railway Safety—HM Chief Inspector of Railways' report on the safety record of railways in Great Britain for 1995–96" copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library—is provided in the table.

Injuries on the London Underground

	Fatal	*Serious*	*Minor*	*Total*
Passengers	2	39	1,986	2,027
Employees	0	42	408	450
Other	0	1	5	6
Trespassers	4	4	0	8
Suicides	20	8	1	29
Total	26	94	2,400	2,520

Figures for 1996–97 are currently being prepared and will be published by the Health and Safety Executive in the next few weeks.

Bus Services

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce measures to regulate bus services to prevent bus companies from reducing services in order to increase profits. [10583]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Such matters will be considered as part of our review of bus policy announced by the Minister of Transport on 25 June.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the proposed withdrawal of the 726 bus route. [11332]

Ms Jackson: I understand that the proposal to withdraw the service is currently the subject of consultation, but this is an operational matter for London Transport Buses.

Stagecoach plc

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on the *(a)* services and *(b)* staff conditions provided by Stagecoach plc from (i) the Stroud parliamentary constituency and (ii) elsewhere. [10584]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Since 1 May, my Department has received 28 letters about Stagecoach bus services—of which four came from members of the public in my hon. Friend's constituency—and four letters, of which two came from my hon. Friend's constituency, about the staff conditions of Stagecoach group bus operators.

Stagecoach does not operate any railway services to Stroud but, since 1 May, the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising has received 59 letters about rail services provided by South West Trains Ltd. and Island Line Ltd., which are part of the Stagecoach group, and four letters about staff conditions. In addition, a further 38 letters have been received regarding restrictions on the carriage of bicycles on new rolling stock which is to be introduced.

Marchioness Incident

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to hold a public inquiry into the sinking of the Marchioness. [11320]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government are considering the case for a public inquiry into the disaster. I will be meeting representatives of the Marchioness Action Group next month to discuss their request for a full and open inquiry. An announcement will be made as soon as a decision is reached.

Bus Fuel Duty

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the bus fuel duty rebate on the provision of an extensive bus transport network; [11265]

(2) what plans he has to restore the full rate of rebate in respect of bus fuel duty; [11266]

(3) if he will make a statement on the future of the bus fuel duty rebate. [11267]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I shall be considering all aspects of support for the bus industry with Treasury colleagues as part of the development of an integrated transport policy.

Public Transport Use

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions by what means he intends to increase the number of journeys made on public transport. [11331]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Promoting the use of public transport needs to take place within the context of the integrated transport policy that the Government are developing. This is why an important part of the fundamental review of transport which my Department is currently taking forward is to examine ways of increasing the use of public transport, and or providing genuine choice to meet people's transport needs.

A42/M42 (Subsidence)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to what extent mining subsidence caused the damage being repaired currently on the A42/M42; and what is the total cost of this work. [11318]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Paddy Tipping, dated 30 July 1997:

The Minister for Transport in London has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question about the A42/M42.

The A42 runs through a mining area and some settlement was expected. The cost of levelling the road is about £500,000. Further settlement is possible.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent representations he has received relating to opportunity slots at Heathrow. [11138]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Since May, my Department has received two letters about opportunity slots, both from operators of business aircraft.

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, transport and the Regions what is his Department's policy towards opportunity slots at Heathrow. [11139]

Ms Jackson: The allocation of all slots at Heathrow is the responsibility of the slot co-ordinator, Airport Co-ordination Ltd., which is currently reviewing procedures for opportunity slots in conjunction with the airport operator Heathrow Airport Ltd. I will write to the my hon. Friend in due course on the Department's role.

Railway Stations

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many stations were open for passengers in *(a)* each of the last five years, *(b)* 1987, *(c)* 1982 and *(d)* 1977. [11574]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of stations open for passengers in Great Britain

	Number
1977	2,358
1982	2,369
1987–88	2,426
1992–93	2,482
1993–94	2,493
1994–95	2,506
1995–96	2,514
1996–97	2,515

From 1985 onwards, station numbers were recorded at the end of the financial year.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was *(a)* the number of route miles open to passenger traffic on rail and *(b)* the total number of route miles on rail in (i) each of the last five years, (ii) 1987, (iii) 1982 and (iv) 1977; what percentage was electrified; what was the number of route miles electrified since the previous year; and what are the estimated figures for the next two years. [11575]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is shown in the table. No estimates are available for the next two years.

Route open for traffic: Great Britain

Miles or percentage

	1977	*1982*	*1987–88*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Route open for passenger traffic	8,958	8,932	8,889	8,882	8,898	8,924	9,323	9,344
All routes:	11,170	10,708	10,360	10,272	10,277	10,281	10,358	10,358
of which electrified	2,341	2,332	2,582	3,052	3,088	3,089	3,208	3,216
Percentage	21.0	21.8	24.9	29.7	30.0	30.0	31.0	31.0
Change in electrified route on the previous year	20	14	0	15	36	1	119	8

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about the potential for combined heat and power after 2000. [12242]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are committed to increasing the UK's combined heat and power capacity beyond the previous Administration's target of 5,000 MW by 2000. A detailed review of the potential for CHP, carried out for my Department by the environment technology support unit, has now been published, and I will be placing a copy in the Library. The ETSU review indicates the cost-effective potential for CHP in industry, commerce and the public sector as being between 10,000 and 17,000 MW, depending on the assumptions made on future energy prices, users' required rate of return on investment, and other factors. The review does not cover additional CHP in the housing and community heating sectors, or the growth in renewable fuelled CHP, both of which are being separately reviewed.

The Government are now reviewing their detailed CHP target for 2010, and will be consulting the Combined Heat and Power Association and others with an interest. They will make further detailed announcement as part of the new UK climate change programme, to be developed after the Kyoto conference.

Environmental Impact Assessment

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to implement directive 97/11/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment; and if he will make a statement. [11981]

Mr. Caborn: The amended environmental impact assessment directive must be implemented by 14 March 1999. The new directive clarifies and amplifies the existing provisions for environmental assessment. It provides a useful tool for the proper assessment of any significant environmental effects of development. It also gives the public greater access to environmental information about such significant projects, enhancing local democracy and ensuring that the decision-making process is open and understood.

I am pleased to announce today the start of the consultation exercise on the principles of implementing the new directive into the town and country planning and other consent systems in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Our aim in implementing the directive is to ensure that the process is beneficial in both environmental and economic terms. We are making a number of specific proposals for implementation which will further this aim while still maintaining the flexibility of the current system.

Copies of the consultation paper have been sent to other Government Departments and to a wide range of business, government and environmental organisations. I have also placed copies in the Libraries of both Houses.

Comments on the Government's proposals should be made to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions by 1 October 1997.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which Government projects have been subjected to an environmental impact assessment since 1 May. [10943]

Mr. Raynsford: Environmental impact assessment is a term used for various types of assessment under a wide range of regulatory regimes. For projects subject to environmental assessment under directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment—the EIA directive—since 1 May, no Government projects have come forward which require EA under three of the implementing regimes for which my Department is responsible: Highways (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations; Harbour Works (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations; and the Transport and Works (Applications and Objections Procedure) Rules. Information is not yet available for this period for planning applications under the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations.

Opencast Coal Extraction

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to publish a consultation paper on planning policy for opencast coal extraction; and if he will make a statement. [11978]

Mr. Caborn: We have published a consultation document on the review of planning policy for opencast coal today. This consultation paper, which deals with England only, seeks views on the issues raised by the 10-point plan for opencast coal, which we prepared when in opposition, and the options for change. In the light of responses to this consultation, the Government will decide what changes to policy guidance could and should be implemented in interim planning guidance, which would better be accommodated in a full review, planned for 1998, of minerals planning guidance note No. 3—coal mining and colliery spoil disposal—and whether any legislative changes are necessary. I intend that this should be a short but thorough inquiry to remove any uncertainty. Copies of the consultation document will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Chisholm), expects to publish shortly an equivalent paper for Scotland.

Oslo and Paris Convention

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the *(a)* scope and *(b)* time scale of the review on the Government's environmental policies on issues relevant to the Ospar Commission. [11865]

Angela Eagle: The review of the UK positions on the issues to be discussed within the Ospar Commission covers all issues relevant to conclusions to be reached by the Commission. It will be completed in time to provide guidance for the UK representatives in those negotiations.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the advantages of lifting the United Kingdom reservations on the Ospar draft objectives relating to *(a)* the continuous reduction of discharges of hazardous substances to the maritime area, *(b)* the continuous reduction of discharges of radioactive substances to the maritime area and *(c)* the prohibition of the dumping of offshore oil installations in the maritime area. [11859]

Angela Eagle: UK reservations on aspects of these instruments are all covered by the review of the UK positions on the issues to be discussed within the Ospar Commission. As I told my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 23 July, *Official Report*, column *623*, I shall write to that hon. Member outlining any major changes on which we decide, and will place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House. I will also send a copy of the letter to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor).

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which civil servants are dealing with the review of the Government's environmental policies on issues relevant to the Ospar commission. [11860]

Angela Eagle: All those civil servants who normally deal with the issues concerned.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which other *(a)* Government Departments and *(b)* organisations his Department is consulting in the review of the Government's environmental policies on issues relevant to the Ospar commission. [11866]

Angela Eagle: The review of the UK positions on the issues to be discussed within the Ospar Commission is to provide guidance for the representatives of the UK Government in those negotiations. All Government Departments with an interest are therefore being consulted. We are also taking into account such views as have been expressed by other organisations.

Radioactive Waste (Edmonton)

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what amount of radioactive waste was handled by the Edmonton waste incinerator in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1997; and what monitoring procedures are in place at the incinerator to monitor levels of radioactivity. [11044]

Angela Eagle: The disposal of radioactive waste is regulated in England and Wales by the Environment Agency under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. I understand that the agency has neither received an application for authorisation nor issued an authorisation under the Act to dispose of radioactive waste at the Edmonton waste incinerator.

British Waterways Board

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations in the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report published in January 1994 on the British Waterways Board. [11628]

Angela Eagle: The British Waterways Board has now made its third and final response to the report. I am placing a copy in the Library of the House.

Disabled Access

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what actions his Department will take to ensure that renovations carried out by the release of capital receipts as proposed in the Local Government Finance (Supplementary Credit Approvals) Bill take into account the access needs of disabled people. [10859]

Mr. Raynsford: It will be for individual local authorities to determine their local needs and priorities when they apply resources released under the capital receipts initiative. When an authority decides to use resources to support new provision by registered social landlords, that development must meet the Housing Corporation's scheme development standards. These set out minimum requirements for new developments: all passenger lifts must be accessible to those in wheelchairs; new developments for the elderly must take account of their increasing accessibility needs; and properties built for wheelchair users must conform to standards agreed with the National Wheelchair Housing Association Group.

Planning Decision (Cockermouth)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to announce a decision in relation to supermarket planning matters in Cockermouth. [10634]

Nick Raynsford: The Secretary of State expects to be able to announce his decision in respect of the four separate proposals for new large food stores in Cockermouth shortly.

Water Pollution

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to introduce further environmental quality standards for the discharges of dangerous substances into controlled waters. [11852]

Mr. Meacher: A consultation paper proposing environmental quality standards for 13 dangerous substances, as defined in directive 76/464/EEC on pollution caused by certain dangerous substances discharged into the aquatic environment of the Community, was issued by my Department in March. It is planned to bring regulations containing these standards before the House shortly. In addition, I have today placed in the Library of the House a consultation paper proposing standards for a further 21 dangerous substances. These substances are:

4-chloro-3-methyl-phenol
2-chlorophenol
2,4-dichlorophenol
2,4 D (ester and non ester)
1,1,1-trichloroethane
1,1,2-trichloroethane
bentazone
benzene
biphenyl
chloronitrotoluenes
demeton
dimethoate
linuron
MCPA
mecoprop
mevinphos
naphthalene
omethoate
toluene
triazaphos
and xylene

Owner-occupied Housing

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of homes in *(a)* each region of the United Kingdom and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole were owner-occupied in each year since 1979. [11304]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The latest available estimates, as at end December for each year, are provided in the table.

Percentage of owner-occupied dwellings: End December:
By standard statistical region in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom

Region/Country	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
North	46.0	46.9	47.7	49.8	51.1	52.0	53.0	54.0	55.2
Yorkshire and Humberside	54.6	56.0	56.4	57.8	58.6	59.2	60.0	60.9	61.9
East Midlands	57.3	59.0	59.8	61.3	62.4	63.1	64.0	65.0	66.1
East Anglia	57.9	58.2	58.8	60.1	61.1	62.1	63.2	64.4	65.7
Greater London	48.5	49.5	49.8	50.7	51.5	52.2	53.0	54.0	54.9
South East (excluding London)	62.2	63.8	64.5	65.6	66.6	67.6	68.5	69.5	70.7
South West	63.2	63.2	63.9	65.0	65.9	66.6	67.5	68.4	69.6
West Midlands	55.8	57.0	57.4	58.8	59.9	60.8	61.5	62.3	63.4
North West	58.6	59.3	59.8	61.0	61.9	62.4	63.0	63.8	64.5
England	56.6	57.7	58.2	59.5	60.5	61.3	62.2	63.2	64.3
Wales	59.3	59.5	62.6	64.2	65.2	66.0	66.7	66.7	67.8
Scotland	35.3	35.6	36.4	37.7	39.1	40.5	41.8	43.1	44.6
Northern Ireland	51.9	52.7	54.0	55.3	56.8	57.8	59.9	60.7	62.1
United Kingdom	54.7	55.4	56.4	57.7	58.7	59.6	60.5	61.5	62.6

Region/Country	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
North	56.5	58.0	60.0	60.4	60.6	60.8	61.2	61.3	61.5
Yorkshire and Humberside	63.2	64.5	65.2	65.3	65.3	65.3	65.4	65.3	65.5
East Midlands	67.5	68.7	70.0	70.1	70.2	70.2	70.4	70.4	70.6
East Anglia	67.3	68.0	68.2	68.3	68.4	68.6	68.9	68.8	69.0
Greater London	55.9	56.8	57.4	57.3	57.2	57.2	57.3	57.0	57.0

Region/Country	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
South East (excluding London)	72.1	73.0	73.3	73.2	73.2	73.3	73.5	73.4	73.5
South West	71.1	72.1	72.3	72.2	72.2	72.3	72.4	72.3	72.4
West Midlands	64.8	66.1	66.7	66.9	66.9	67.1	67.4	67.4	67.7
North West	65.4	66.4	67.0	67.2	67.3	67.4	67.7	67.6	67.8
England	65.6	66.6	67.1	67.2	67.2	67.3	67.5	67.5	67.6
Wales	69.1	70.5	70.8	70.9	71.0	71.1	71.1	71.1	71.3
Scotland	46.7	49.1	51.2	52.4	54.1	55.5	56.9	57.9	[1]—
Northern Ireland	62.8	64.0	65.3	66.1	66.8	67.8	[2]—	68.6	[1]—
United Kingdom	64.0	65.2	65.8	66.0	66.2	66.4	[2]—	66.8	[1]—

[1] Figures are not yet available.

[2] Tenure split not available.

Water and Sewerage Companies (Investment)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much has been invested in the water and sewerage systems by each water and sewerage company in each year since 1987. [11195]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* Information on water and sewerage companies' investment since privatisation in 1989 is available in the report on the financial performance and capital investment of the water companies in England and Wales published annually by the Office of Water Services. The annual "Waterfacts", published by the Water Services Association, has shown figures for capital expenditure by water and sewerage companies and, before privatisation, by water authorities. Copies of both these publications are in the Library. Expenditure by water authorities included sums spent on some functions, including pollution control, flood protection and land drainage, which in 1989 were transferred to the National Rivers Authority.

Hybrid Wolves

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what conditions his Department places upon the breeding and keeping of hybrid wolf dogs; [11095]

(2) what regulations are in place to monitor the selling of hybrid wolf dogs; [11099]

(3) what assessment he has made of the impact on public safety of the keeping of hybrid wolf dogs in residential areas; [11100]

(4) what studies his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the breeding of hybrid wolf dogs. [11101]

Angela Eagle: The keeping of wolf hybrids is controlled under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976. Under the Act, a licence is required to keep such animals. The issuing of licences and the day-to-day administration of the Act are the responsibility of the relevant local authority.

A licence can be issued only if a local authority is satisfied that it would not be against the public interest on grounds of safety or nuisance; that the applicant is a suitable person to hold a licence; that the proposed accommodation ensures that the animal will not escape, and is suitable from an animal welfare point of view. In issuing licences, local authorities may require restrictions on the movement of the animal from the premises specified in the licence, and impose any other condition which they consider appropriate.

The 1976 Act contains no provisions relating to the breeding or sale of wolf hybrids, and the Department has not undertaken any studies into their breeding. However, in replying to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 9 July 1997, *Official Report,* column *496*, I indicated that the Department will be considering whether further guidance under the Act is required.

Planning Process

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce statutory time limits for the planning process; and if he will make a statement. [11070]

Mr. Raynsford: Article 20 of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 already specifies the time periods within which planning decisions should be taken and we have no plans to amend this aspect of the legislation. The responses to my Department's recent consultation paper on development plans confirmed the difficulty of setting a statutory timetable for the development plan process which would be appropriate to all authorities. However, certain parts of the process are already subject to time limits and we are considering the scope for extending this. We are also looking at the possibility of requiring authorities publicly to set target timetables for the adoption of their plans, for which they would be accountable locally.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he proposes to improve the procedures involved in taking planning decisions. [11069]

Mr. Raynsford: We are currently considering what steps might be taken to speed up the planning process and will be announcing our conclusions in due course.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the number of changes of use that occur within use categories in planning terms. [10880]

Mr. Raynsford: Under section 55 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, changes of use within individual use classes are not development, do not require planning permission and are therefore not recorded.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will allow objectors the right of appeal in planning matters. [10879]

Mr. Raynsford: We have no plans to extend the right of appeal to third parties in planning cases. It is for elected local authorities to act in the general public interest when determining planning applications. Planning legislation already provides extensive opportunities for members of the public and interested organisations to comment on both draft development plans and individual planning applications.

Plastic Silage Wrap

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take measures to increase the quantity of waste silage-wrap which goes for recycling. [11148]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on Monday 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *48*. In addition, we are looking to see what further measures could be taken to increase the quantity of waste silage wrap which is recycled.

Dry Stone Walls

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to *(a)* prevent the destruction and *(b)* encourage and improve maintenance of dry stone walls in England and Wales. [11153]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Ms Jackson) on 9 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *495*. Responsibility for dry stone walling in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Estates Renewal Challenge Fund

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many council estates have benefited from the estates renewal challenge fund. [10928]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Sixty-nine estates have received £316 million of funding under rounds 1 and 2 of the estates renewal challenge fund.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list, by year, the number of applications for consent to release organisms genetically modified for ampicillin resistance that have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* rejected for the purposes of (i) field testing and (ii) marketing. [10975]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Since the coming into force of the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992, (i) seven applications to field test genetically modified organisms with the ampicillin-resistance gene, whether the gene be functional or not, have been granted a consent and, (ii) no applications for consent to market GMOs with ampicillin-resistance gene have been received in Great Britain. The numbers by year for the field testing are as follows:

Year	*Granted*	*Rejected*
1993	'1	0
1994	0	0
1995	'1+1	0
1996	2	0
1997	'1+1	0

Applications marked ' had a functional ampicillin resistance gene.

Methyl Bromide

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to tighten controls on the use of methyl bromide. [10967]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* EC regulation 3093/94 places a freeze on the production and consumption of methyl bromide at 1991 levels from 1995, and requires a further 25 per cent. cut from 1998. The Montreal protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer requires all developed countries to phase out methyl bromide by 2010, with cuts of 25 per cent. in 2001 and 50 per cent. in 2005.

The controls on methyl bromide under the Montreal protocol will be reviewed at the ninth meeting of the parties in September. At the Environment Council in June, Environment Ministers agreed that the controls should be strengthened and that the European Community should propose that the phase-out date for developed countries should be advanced to 2005 subject to exemptions for critical uses. The Community will also propose that there should be an interim cut of 50 per cent. in 2001.

Emissions

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what has been the change in United Kingdom levels of emissions of *(a)* chlorofluorocarbons and *(b)* sulphur dioxide since 1979. [10980]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Total UK emissions of sulphur dioxide have decreased from 5,553,000 tonnes in 1979 to 2,365,000 tonnes in 1995, a reduction of 57 per cent.

No information is collected on the level of emissions of CFCs, but information is held on the level of consumption. The earliest data are from 1986, when UK consumption was 58,357 tonnes. This decreased to 1,702 tonnes in 1995, a reduction of 97 per cent.

Environmental and Nature Conservation Bodies

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the role of environmental and nature conservation statutory bodies; which bodies will be subject to review; what will be the nature of the review; and what plans he has to consult non-governmental environmental organisations for their views. [10944]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the news release issued by the Deputy Prime Minister on 24 July about the reviews being undertaken by the Department, which includes reviews on the environment, and countryside and rural policy. Copies of the news release have been placed in the House Libraries. Officials conducting the reviews will be interested to receive the views of outside bodies.

Lorries (Noise Pollution)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take steps to control noise pollution arising from refrigeration units on lorries. [10878]

Angela Eagle: Manufacturers of refrigeration equipment are aware of the nuisance these devices can cause and I understand that noisier separate engines are slowly being replaced with more advanced systems which can be considerably quieter.

Traffic commissioners have powers when considering applications for operator licences to impose operational restrictions on a licence to minimise disturbance and, in certain circumstances, may refuse a licence.

Under part III of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, as amended by the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993, local authorities have wide-ranging powers to prevent or abate noise nuisance which is prejudicial to health or a common law nuisance and which is emitted from vehicles, machinery and equipment in the street. If a local authority officer judges a problem complained about to be a "statutory nuisance" then he must serve an abatement notice on the person responsible or, where that person cannot be found, by placing the notice on the vehicle. Failure to comply with the terms of a noise abatement notice can result in substantial penalties.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10729]

Angela Eagle: My Department authorises Chessington Computer Services Ltd., through its standard payroll input and retrieval system—SPIRE—to undertake the full range of payroll functions covering all staff including those in next steps agencies and, until 1 August those in the Government Office for the Regions.

My Department also carries out payroll work on behalf of the Office of the Rail Regulator and the London Regional Passengers Committee. Total costs in 1996–97, inclusive of internal and Chessington charges, were £2.04 million.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 23 July, *Official Report,* column *624,* if he will provide an exemplification for each local authority of the revenue support grant they would receive in 1998–99 based on the figures for local government published in the Red Book and adjusted by the Budget, applying the distribution methodology used in the 1997–98 settlement. [10953]

Mr. Raynsford: It is not possible to provide direct exemplifications in the manner requested. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made stated additions to net total standard spending and net aggregate external funding in the Budget. However, no decision has yet been made on the level of revenue support grant for 1998–99. A decision on the level of revenue support grant for 1998–99 will be announced later this year.

Millennium Experience (Land Decontamination)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures *(a)* have been taken and *(b)* will be taken to decontaminate the land which is planned to be developed for the Millennium Experience at Greenwich; and what estimate he has made of the cost of these measures. [10596]

Angela Eagle: Under the terms of the conveyance of the site, British Gas, the original owners, has completed the statutory decontamination of the site of the dome to the requirements of the Environment Agency and the London borough of Greenwich. British Gas contractors are now undertaking the statutory decontamination of the balance of the exhibition site and this work should be completed in October 1997. The cost of the decontamination is borne entirely by British Gas and is commercially confidential.

English Partnerships has completed the development remediation of the site of the dome and will let a contract in August to complete the development remediation of the balance of the exhibition site. English Partnerships' current forecast expenditure on development remediation of the exhibition site is £13 million.

Lophelia Pertusa

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will draw up a species action plan for the conservation of lophelia pertusa. [10657]

Angela Eagle: The UK biodiversity group is currently reviewing the species and habitats for which further national biodiversity action plans should be prepared. It is expected to provide its advice to Government in the autumn.

Water Savings Trust

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to implement the recommendation made by the Environment Committee in its report on water conservation and supply—first report, HC 42, 1996–97, concerning the establishment of a water savings trust. [10648]

Angela Eagle: Water companies are under a duty to promote the efficient use of water by their customers and have prepared water efficiency plans to implement that duty. In addition, the Government have recently established the environmental task force, which may have a role to play, for example through the installation of water-saving devices and promotion of water efficiency. The Government are keen that all complementary avenues, including the possibility of a water saving trust, are investigated, but do not envisage offering any assistance at this stage.

Housing Sites

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will encourage local authorities to identify brown-field sites for new housing wherever possible; and if he will make a statement. [10525]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government already encourage local authorities to reuse previously developed land for housing wherever possible. Some of these sites arise from redevelopment opportunities which cannot always be foreseen, which means that they cannot always be identified in advance. It is therefore important that local planning authorities have clear policies in their development plans that encourage the reuse of previously developed land for housing, particularly within urban areas. This is also an issue that was raised by respondents to last November's Green Paper on household growth; we are currently considering all the responses received.

Oil Extraction (Atlantic Frontier)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the implications of his policy and targets in respect of carbon dioxide emissions for proposals to extract oil in the Atlantic frontier area. [10658]

Angela Eagle: The Government have set themselves challenging domestic target to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. from 1990 levels by 2010 and we are currently looking at the policy options which could contribute towards that target.

The most recent projections for carbon dioxide emissions, published in energy paper No. 65, take account of likely developments in oil and gas production in the United Kingdom. In 1995, carbon dioxide emissions from oil and gas production accounted for 3.5 per cent. of national carbon dioxide emissions. Any oil production which might take place in the Atlantic frontier is not expected to result in a significant increase or decrease in national carbon dioxide emissions.

Out-of-town Developments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his policy in respect of future planning applications for out-of-town developments; and if he will make a statement. [10606]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government's planning policy guidance on this issue remains as set out in PPG6: Town Centres and Retail Developments and PPG13: Transport.

Multilateral Investment Agreement

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the latest draft of the multilateral agreement on investment with the Government's policies on sustainable development. [10655]

Angela Eagle: The Government are working hard for a successful conclusion to the negotiations on a multilateral agreement on investment. Our objective is to achieve an agreement with the highest possible standards of investor protection, liberalisation of investment regimes, and effective dispute settlement. But this Government would not agree to an MAI which damages our commitments to sustainable development, environmental protection and core labour standards. We shall therefore continue to work to ensure that these commitments are properly reflected in the agreement.

Waterway Speed Limits

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the cost of changing waterway speed limits and speed limit signs to metric measurements to *(a)* public funds, *(b)* the owners of motor boats and cruisers on the Broads and *(c)* the Broads Authority. [10336]

Angela Eagle: No nationwide assessment has been made. The Broads Authority estimates the total costs of changing its speed limits and signs to metric would be some £54,000. Since the cost of operating the Broads Authority's navigations is financed by users, these costs would be recovered from boaters via their licence fees.

Leasehold Valuation Tribunals

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress on the reform of leasehold valuation tribunals. [10241]

Ms Armstrong: Service charge disputes are renowned for causing distress and misery to many leaseholders who have, in the past, had to go to court to challenge unreasonable charges, risking unknown and potentially high costs.

From 1 September, leaseholders will be able to apply to the 11 leasehold valuation tribunals, which will use their specialist professional expertise towards settling these disputes. Leaseholders' risks of incurring large legal bills will also be limited, because the tribunals do not award costs. Applicants will, however, have to pay a fee of up to £500 for each application, although the tribunals will have a discretion to require the other party to the dispute to reimburse this fee.

As well as challenging service charge bills for costs already incurred by the landlord, leaseholders will now be able to challenge works which are proposed. Landlords too will be able to seek a determination that the costs or scope of the proposed works are reasonable before they start spending money.

Bad management is a continuing problem for tenants of flats, who will now also be able to apply to the tribunal instead of the county court for the appointment of a new manager, if the tribunal is satisfied that the landlord has determined, or is likely to demand excessive service charges, or that he has failed to comply with a relevant provision of one of the three approved codes of management practice available.

National Sustainable Development Plan

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Government have to introduce an annual national sustainable development plan; and if he will make a statement. [8673]

Angela Eagle: Defining objectives and indicators, and reporting on them, will be an important element of the Government's approach to sustainable development, and we will be considering how to do so in ways which are regular, transparent and accessible.

Offshore Supplies Office

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the members of the board of the Offshore Supplies Office; and which companies they represent. [8989]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

The Offshore Supplies Office was renamed the Oil, Gas and petrochemicals Supplies Office but has retained the acronym "OSO". The OSO is advised by a board drawn from the private sector and appointed by Ministers in line with Nolan procedures. Board members give their advice as individuals and do not formally represent their employers.

The following is a list of board members and their employers:

Sir Ian Wood CBE, Chairman and Managing Director, John Wood Group Plc.

Sir Alan Cockshaw, Chairman, AMEC Plc.

Paul Barron, Managing Director, Industrial Gas Turbine Group, European Gas

Turbines Ltd.

John Blythe, Chairman and Chief Executive, Foster Wheeler Ltd.

Tom Cardale, Managing Director, Consolidated Supply Management Ltd.

Rodney Chase, Chief Executive Officer, BP Exploration Company Ltd.

Dr. Chris Fay, Chairman and Chief Executive, Shell UK Ltd.

John Hood, Managing Director, Weir Pumps Ltd.

Alasdair Locke, Chairman, Abbot Group

David Moorhouse, Chief Executive, Kvaerner John Brown

David Varney, Chief Executive, BG Plc

Health and Safety (Prosecutions)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the number of prosecutions which the Health and Safety Executive has brought against each local authority in England in the last three years; and how many have resulted in convictions. [3252]

Angela Eagle *[pursuant to her reply, 12 June 1997, c. 520–22]*: In the three years from 1993–94 to 1995–96 the Health and Safety Executive prosecuted local authorities in England 63 times for 92 alleged breaches of health and safety law and secured 87 convictions. Details from HSE's records are shown in the table. This table supersedes that given in the answer to this question on 12 June. Figures for the year April 1996 to March 1997 are not yet available.

Summary of prosecutions—local authorities in England 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96

Local authority	*Occasions prosecuted*	*Breaches alleged*	*Convictions*
Wealden District Council	1	1	1
East Sussex County Council	1	1	1
London Borough of Islington	1	1	1
St. Edmundsbury Borough Council	2	3	3
Norwich City Council	1	2	2
Stevenage Borough Council	1	1	1
Salford Metropolitan Borough Council	1	1	1
Lancaster City Council	1	1	1
Sunderland City Council	1	2	2
Avon County Council	1	1	1
Somerset County Council	1	1	0
London Borough of Southwark	1	2	1
City of Birmingham	1	1	1
Bromsgrove District Council	2	2	2
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council	1	1	1
Harrogate District Council	1	1	1
Manchester City Council	2	3	3
Durham County Council	1	1	1
South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council	1	2	2
Gateshead Borough Council	1	1	1
Cleveland County Council	1	1	1
Lancashire County Council	1	1	1
Hertfordshire County Council	3	7	7
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council	1	1	1
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council	2	2	2
Corporation of London	2	4	4
Elmbridge Borough Council	1	1	1
Surrey County Council	1	2	2
London Borough of Harrow	1	4	4
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham	1	1	1
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	1	1	1
St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council	1	3	2
Berkshire County Council	1	2	2
London Borough of Greenwich	1	1	1
London Borough of Hackney	1	1	1
Tameside Metropolitan District Council	1	2	2
Cornwall County Council	1	1	1
London Borough of Haringey	2	2	2
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham	1	1	1
Colchester Borough Council	1	1	1
London Borough of Redbridge	1	1	1
Bedford Borough Council	1	3	3
Wrekin District Council	1	2	1
Nottingham City Council	1	1	1
Newark and Sherwood District Council	1	1	1
Humberside County Council	2	4	3
Liverpool City Council	1	1	1
London Borough of Enfield	1	2	2
Uttlesford District Council	1	2	2
Sandwell Metropolitan District Council	1	2	2
London Borough of Hillingdon	1	2	2
Grimsby Borough Council	1	1	1
Wakefield Metropolitan District Council	1	1	1
Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council	1	1	1
Totals	63	92	87

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 31 July 1997

WALES

Education Expenditure

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the percentage of local authorities' total expenditure spent on education for each county in Wales for the years *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93, *(c)* 1993–94, *(d)* 1994–95, *(e)* 1995–96 and *(f)* 1996–97, ranked in order from the highest percentage to the lowest. [10865]

Mr. Hain: The information requested is given in the following table:

Percentage of local authority expenditure spent on education ranked[1]

	Per cent.
1991–92	
Powys	47
Mid Glamorgan	47
Clwyd	47
Gwent	45
Dyfed	44
West Glamorgan	43
South Glamorgan	42
Gwynedd	41
1992–93	
Clwyd	47
Powys	46
Gwent	46
Mid Glamorgan	44
West Glamorgan	43
Dyfed	43
Gwynedd	41
South Glamorgan	40
1993–94	
Gwent	43
Mid Glamorgan	41
Powys	41
Clwyd	40
West Glamorgan	39
Dyfed	39
South Glamorgan	37
Gwynedd	36
1994–95	
Gwent	43
Mid Glamorgan	39
Powys	38
West Glamorgan	38
Clywd	38
South Glamorgan	38
Dyfed	37
Gwynedd	34
1995–96	
South Glamorgan	39
Gwent	39
Mid Glamorgan	38
Powys	37
Clwyd	36
West Glamorgan	36
Dyfed	36
Gwynedd	33
1996–97	
Pembrokeshire	41
Torfaen	41
Monmouthshire	40
Cardiff	39
Caerphilly	39
Bridgend	39
Flintshire	38
Rhondda Cynon Taff	38
Powys	38
Merthyr Tydfil	38
The Vale of Glamorgan	38
Carmarthenshire	37
Isle of Anglesey	37
Newport	37
Ceredigion	37
Swansea	36
Denbighshire	36
Neath Port Talbot	36
Conwy	35
Wrexham	35
Blaenau Gwent	34
Gwynedd	33

[1] On 1 April 1995, police authorities became authorities in their own right. Prior to that date, police expenditure formed part of county council overall expenditure. For consistency across years, police expenditure has been excluded throughout.

Higher and further education colleges transferred out of the local authority sector on 1 April 1992 and 1 April 1993 respectively and this may affect patterns of expenditure before and after these dates.

Up to 1995–96 includes county and district services to be consistent with 1996–97 unitary authority figures.

Welsh Assembly

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the administration cost for 1996–97 of each of the executive agencies listed in annexe B of the White Paper on a Welsh Assembly; and if he will make a statement. [11931]

Mr. Ron Davies: The following table sets out the latest available information for those executive agencies listed in annexe B of the White Paper on Welsh devolution:

	Administration costs 1996–97 £ million[1]
Non-departmental public bodies	
Welsh Development Agency	20.3
Development Board for Rural Wales	3.4
Land Authority for Wales	1.8
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	4.3
Wales Tourist Board	4.0
Countryside Council for Wales	8.9
Tai Cymru	2.9
Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales	1.6
Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting	1.0
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales	1.9
Further Education Funding Council for Wales	2.4
Residuary Body for Wales	0.2

	Administration costs 1996–97 £ million[1]
Welsh Language Board	1.1
Agricultural Wages Committees (there are six regional committees in Wales)	0.002
National Museums and Galleries of Wales	10.4
National Library of Wales	4.9
Sports Council for Wales	1.0
Arts Council of Wales	1.8
Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales	1.2
NHS bodies[2]	
5 Health Authorities	17.4
2 Special Health Authorities	18.7
29 Trusts	129.7

[1] There is no fixed definition of administration costs and the criteria used vary from organisation to organisation.

[2] The source of these figures is the 1996–97 unaudited accounts and may change. The audited figures for 1996–97 will be available in August/September.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed in each of the executive bodies outlined in annexe B of the White Paper on a Welsh Assembly: what changes to these numbers he envisages following the changes to their status proposed in the White Paper; and if he will make a statement. [11929]

Mr. Davies: Details of staff numbers are published annually in "Public Bodies", a Cabinet Office publication, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. I expect that the reforms detailed in the White Paper will lead to efficiencies in the delivery of services, but it is not possible to say precisely at this stage how this will affect staff numbers. This will depend upon decisions yet to be taken by the boards of the bodies concerned, the Welsh Assembly and me.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what savings in administration costs he calculates will accrue from the proposed changes to the executive bodies listed in the White Paper on a Welsh Assembly; and if he will make a statement. [11930]

Mr. Davies: I expect that savings in administration costs will accrue from the abolition or merger of five executive non-departmental public bodies, two special health authorities and two training and enterprise councils, because there will be fewer boards, chief executives and so on. But it is not possible to calculate precisely at this stage what the savings will be, because that depends on decisions yet to be taken by the boards of the bodies concerned, the Welsh Assembly and me.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the cost of setting up the information hotline relating to the Welsh Assembly; and if this figure has been included in his Department's estimates of the cost of disseminating information relating to the Welsh Assembly. [12019]

Mr. Davies: The telephone helpline cost £13,054.25 to set up. This figure has been included in the published estimates. The Government believe that it is necessary that the public be fully informed of their proposals for a Welsh Assembly, the establishment of which was a key element in the election manifesto.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many copies of the White Paper on the Government's proposals for a Welsh Assembly have been printed; what forecasts he has made of their likely sales; what has been the total subsidy towards production of the White Paper to date; and if this figure has been included in his Department's published estimates of the cost of disseminating information relating to the Welsh Assembly. [12020]

Mr. Davies: Twelve thousand five hundred copies of the White Paper have been printed. Sales forecasts for White Papers is a matter for the Stationery Office. However, it is my intention that this document should be easily available to anyone throughout Wales. Up to now, I have agreed a subsidy of £17,200. Any additional subsidy—for example, because of particularly high demand—will be a matter for negotiation between my officials and the Stationery Office. It is my intention that costs will remain within published estimates. The Government believe that it is necessary that the public be fully informed of their proposals for a Welsh Assembly, the establishment of which was a key element in the election manifesto.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will produce a video version of his proposals for a Welsh Assembly carrying subtitles and sign language interpretation. [12002]

Mr. Davies: A printed summary of the Government's proposals will be delivered to every household in Wales. This will be supported by television advertising and telephone helpline. I have no plans to produce a separate video.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will ensure that all publicly broadcast information in relation to the forthcoming referendum in Wales carries subtitles and sign language interpretation. [11999]

Mr. Davies: Television advertising in support of the referendum information campaign will carry Teletext subtitles. I will examine the practicality of also including sign language.

Roads Programme

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what plans he has to build new roads across the Gwent levels; and if he will make a statement; [11902]

(2) if he will list all continuing plans under the roads programme; and if he will make a statement. [11911]

Mr. Hain: My right hon. Friend announced the broad terms of a strategic review of the trunk roads programme in Wales on 3 July, and we are today publishing a consultation document.

The review will be set firmly within the context of the development of a balanced, integrated transport policy for Wales. I intend to take a strategic approach to the process of making decisions on the roads programme, judging proposals—including those relating to the Gwent levels—on the criteria of accessibility, safety, economy and the environment, together with their contribution to the achievement of an integrated strategy.

Copies of the consultation paper are being sent to interested parties and placed in the Library of the House. It is also available on request from my Department.

Family Planning Services

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the Welsh health authorities concerning recent changes in the provision of family planning services; if he will list recent changes in family planning service provision notified to him; and what guidance he has issued to health authorities on the commissioning of such services. [11927]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I have had no consultation with chairmen of health authorities regarding family planning services. Government policy is that people should be free to choose their source of contraceptive advice and that health authorities' family planning services complement rather than duplicate those services provided by GPs. Guidance which reminded health authorities of their responsibilities was issued to the service in Wales in 1990 and reinforced in 1993 by the "Protocol for Investment in Health Gain: Healthy Living".

Copies of both documents have been placed in the Library of the House.

Ms Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the relationship between changes in the level of provision of family planning services and the number of abortions carried out in Wales. [11928]

Mr. Griffiths: The following figures show the general downward trend of abortions in Wales. The increase in the first quarter of 1996 might be attributable to the reaction to publicity about oral contraceptives and thrombosis in October 1995.

Abortions performed to women resident in Wales

1988: 7,379

1989: 7,366

1990: 7,440

1991: 7,187

1992: 6,856

1993: 6,924

1994: 6,775

1995: 6,442

1996: 7,279

Abortions performed in Wales

	1995	*1996*	*Percentage increase from 1995 figure*
January–March	1,073	1,226	14
April–June	1,061	1,097	3
July–September	1,115	1,033	–7
October–December	1,107	1,031	–7

St. David's Day

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to have St. David's day made a bank holiday in Wales. [11718]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Government have no current plans to change the bank holiday arrangements in the UK. However, I am sympathetic to the sentiment that my hon. Friend expresses and will seek to promote further consideration of this idea within government.

Business Start-up Scheme

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many unemployed people have qualified for assistance on the business start-up scheme in each of the last five years; and what was the annual expenditure. [12169]

Mr. Hain: The information requested for Wales is given in the following table:

	Number of participants[1]	*Expenditure (£ million)*
1992–93	2,077	4,683
1993–94	1,957	5,174
1994–95	1,958	4,979
1995–96	1,593	4,821
1996–97	1,679	4,703
Total	9,264	24,360

[1] At March each year.

Aberfan

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will consider restoring to the people of Aberfan the sums taken from them in 1968 towards the cost of removing coal tips above the village. [12269]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have long made clear my view that there should have been no requirement in the first place for a contribution to be made from the disaster fund toward the costs of clearing the tips.

I am pleased to announce today that I shall be making available a grant of £150,000 to repay the sum originally contributed and to supplement provision in the Aberfan disaster fund and in the memorial charity. My Department will be discussing with the trustees how this money can best be spent for the benefit of the community of Aberfan.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what approach he will adopt when considering applications for sanction by local authorities under sections 19 and 20 of the Local Government Act 1982; and if he will make a statement. [12455]

Mr. Win Griffiths: As required by the statute, we shall decide each application for sanction on its merits having regard both to our policy on sanction applications and to the circumstances of the individual case concerned. Our policy is to continue the approach previously followed—that the power to sanction should not be exercised too widely. Sanction may be appropriate in those cases where the expenditure is incurred in good faith, but in ignorance of the strict letter of the law, or inadvertently without observance of requisite formalities, or under such circumstances as make it fair and equitable that the expenditure should not be disallowed by the auditor.

In accordance with our commitment to open government, we will send to the Welsh Local Government Association, the Audit Commission, the Commission for

Local Administration in Wales and to all local authorities in Wales a departmental note setting out the basis on which applications for sanctions under sections 19 and 20 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 are to be made and considered. Copies of the note will be placed in the Library of the House as soon as possible.

Council Tax (Second Homes)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will review the operation of the legislation on council tax discounts for second homes in Wales. [12456]

Mr. Win Griffiths: My right hon. Friend and I are aware of the concerns of a number of local authorities about the operation of the legislation on council tax discounts for second homes and have decided to review it in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association.

Small Firms

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to address the implications of the multilateral agreement on investment for small firms in Wales. [10654]

Mrs. Roche: The multilateral agreement on investment will be the first multilateral, comprehensive and legally binding investment instrument and will represent a major step towards a global level playing field for investors. It will create the framework which all businesses need to be able to take international investment decisions with greater confidence.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the investigation by the Legal Aid Board's special investigations unit of the applications for legal aid made by a constituent of the hon. Member for Taunton, whose name has been supplied to him. [11615]

Mr. Hoon: I do not comment on, or intervene in, the award of legal aid in individual cases. I have, however, been advised by the Legal Aid Board that the investigation of the hon. Lady's constituent's means by the special investigations unit is still in progress.

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures he is taking to prevent multiple applications to the Legal Aid Board through different regional offices to support unnecessary litigation. [11631]

Mr. Hoon: All application forms for legal aid require the applicant to state if they have applied for legal aid before and, if so, to provide details. The declaration to be signed by the applicant makes clear the range of penalties available if the applicant knowingly gives false information or withholds relevant information.

The Legal Aid Board is introducing a new corporate information system which will give every legally assisted person a unique personal identifier. This will provide board staff with the applicant's full legal aid history, preventing applications relating to the same case from being submitted to more than one regional office.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10733]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor's Department's departmental pay unit is responsible for collating and inputting data to enable the payment of salaries and allowances to staff of the Lord Chancellor's Department, including the Court Service and the Public Trust Office agencies, and to certain full-time judicial officers and judges. The Department also processes data for the payment of fees and retainers for the clerks to the general commissioners of income tax, the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee on legal education and conduct and staff of the legal services ombudsman's office. The unit also inputs data to enable the payments of some pensions.

Payments are actually made by Chessington Computer Services Ltd. on behalf of the Lord Chancellor's Department. It also calculates, deducts and pays income tax and national insurance.

Payment of fees to part-time judicial officers and certain part-time Lord Chancellor's Department staff are processed by local offices within the Lord Chancellor's Department, with deductions for tax and national insurance. Some offices use manual systems, while others use an in-house accounting package for calculation and payment.

For the centralised payroll function, the Department uses SPIRE—standard payroll input and retrieval—a software package operated by Chessington on a bureau basis. This permits the Department's payroll staff to input data on payments and deductions direct to the payroll computer at Chessington.

Staff costs of the Department's pay unit in 1996–97 were £492,952, with £6,817 being spent in postage, training, staff travel and miscellaneous items. Chessington Computer Services Ltd. provided its services at a cost in 1996–97 of £780,867.

Solicitors (Complaints)

Mr. John Cryer: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has for the creation of an independent body to adjudicate on complaints against solicitors. [11226]

Mr. Hoon: The Department has no plans to create a new complaints handling body. The Office for the Supervision of Solicitors was set up by the Law Society in September 1996 and I agree with the legal services ombudsman that it will take two to three years before the office can be properly judged by results.

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for his Department. [11571]

Mr. Hoon: As Green Minister for the Lord Chancellor's Department, I am currently revising the Department's environmental strategy and associated action plans. Waste minimisation will be one of the major elements within this strategy.

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste within his Department. [11572]

Mr. Hoon: As Green Minister for the Lord Chancellor's Department, I am currently revising the Department's waste management procedures. The information gathered during this process will be used to measure progress in the reduction of levels of waste in due course.

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by his Department in each of the last five years. [11573]

Mr. Hoon: The information requested is not available. The Lord Chancellor's Department has 417 buildings, each with separate contracts for collection of confidential and ordinary waste. The information could not be determined without incurring disproportionate cost. As Green Minister for the Lord Chancellor's Department, I am currently reviewing the arrangements for collection of waste.

The existing arrangement is for confidential waste to be collected by specialist contractors. All other waste is collected through local authorities. Paper collected by our confidential waste contractors is either pulped prior to recycling or incinerated to produce electricity. I intend that all our paper waste should be disposed of in this way.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the Crown Prosecution Service's consideration of the unlawful killing of Mr. Shiji Lapite. [11282]

The Attorney-General: Following the concerns expressed by the divisional court, the Director of Public Prosecutions has, with my full support, commissioned an inquiry into the decision by the Crown Prosecution Service not to bring criminal proceedings following the deaths of Shiji Lapite and Michael O'Brien. It will be headed by His Honour Gerald Butler QC and it will inquire into the considerations by the Crown Prosecution Service of the Lapite and O'Brien cases and, more generally, the process and quality of casework decision making in deaths in custody cases.

His Honour Gerald Butler QC will make such recommendations as appear appropriate and will report to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who will then report to me. The report will be made public.

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General what are the terms of reference for the review of the CPS; from what sources evidence and opinions are being sought; and what is the timetable for the review. [12213]

The Attorney-General: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Gillian Merron) on 12 June, *Official Report*, columns *533–34*.

CABINET OFFICE

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio (1) pursuant to his answer of 28 July, *Official Report*, column *25*, for what reasons he is unable to itemise the journeys undertaken at public expense since 2 May; [11804]

(2) what were the objectives of his recent visit to France. [11811]

Mr. Mandelson: I do not propose to disclose the details of conversations, meetings or other engagements undertaken in pursuance of my duties as Minister without Portfolio.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what independent advice he has taken in respect of the environmental impact of *(a)* the materials and *(b)* the method of construction identified for the millennium dome. [11878]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company, of which I am sole shareholder, has taken the advice of a wide range of organisations in the construction field. Specifically, the environmental consultant, Battle McCarthy, was commissioned to provide advice on the construction of the millennium dome, including its environmental impact. In preparing its report Battle McCarthy drew on the technical expertise of the dome's architects, the Richard Rogers Partnership, and the consulting engineers, Buro Happold.

Ministerial Advisers

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will list the persons who are not established civil servants who advise or assist him in the performance of his ministerial duties indicating their age and previous occupations, the use they make of official accommodation, equipment, facilities, transport and secretarial services, the access they are given to official meetings or unpublished official information, and the person or organisation responsible for their remuneration. [11720]

Mr. Mandelson: I have nothing further to add to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 18 July, *Official Report*, columns *340–41*.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what funding is presently committed from his departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [11889]

Dr. David Clark: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore be writing to the hon. Member and will place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Sick Leave

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list for each Department and agency *(a)* the average days of sick leave, *(b)* the total days of sick leave and *(c)* the index figure, taking the civil service average as 100, in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [11504]

Dr. David Clark: The information requested is shown in the tables for 1994 and 1995. It is based on figures in the report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service 1995" prepared for my department by the Occupational Health and Safety Agency Ltd. and published last month. Figures for earlier years could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

My Department regularly encourages Departments and agencies to review their approaches to sickness absence management.

Working days lost through sickness absence 1994

	Average working days lost[1]	*Estimated number of working days lost*[2]	*Index of average working days lost (Civil Service average=100)*
Civil Service	9.9	4,902,000	100
Departments/Agencies of >10,000 staff			
Ministry of Defence	8.1	664,300	82
Customs and Excise	8.3	218,700	84
Inland Revenue	9.6	614,300	97
Home Office	10.5	499,500	106
Lord Chancellor Department	10.7	134,500	108
Employment Service	11.3	538,300	114
Benefits Agency	12.4	849,200	125
Departments/Agencies of 5,000–10,000 staff			
Department of Trade and Industry	7.0	52,700	71
Department of Transport	7.4	45,700	74
MAFF	8.0	59,600	81
Crown Prosecution Service	8.7	58,600	88
Scottish Office	8.8	53,900	89
Employment Department	10.2	62,300	103
Land Registry	10.9	96,100	110
Contributions Agency	11.3	107,000	114
Child Support Agency	11.6	65,700	117
National Savings Department	14.3	84,300	144
Departments/Agencies of 1,000–5,000 staff			
Met Office	4.9	7,900	50
ADAS (MAFF)	6.2	10,700	62
HM Treasury	7.0	9,600	71
HMSO	7.3	14,900	73
Department of the Environment	7.8	35,800	79
Department for Education	8.2	13,900	83
Ordnance Survey	8.4	17,600	84
Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal	8.4	8,600	85
Health and Safety Executive	8.6	35,600	87
Insolvency Service	8.6	15,900	87
Overseas Development Administration	8.6	10,800	87
Vehicle Inspectorate	8.7	12,100	88
IT Services Agency	8.9	34,300	89
Central Statistical Office	9.1	12,500	92
Welsh Office	9.5	21,500	96
Department of Health	9.7	47,700	98
OPCS	10.3	20,700	104
Intervention Board	10.7	10,700	108
Companies House	12.4	12,800	125
Department of Social Security	12.7	38,500	128
War Pensions Agency	12.8	19,800	129
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	13.2	46,200	133
Scottish Prison Service (SO)	13.3	56,900	135
Driving Standards Agency	14.6	23,700	148
Registers of Scotland	14.7	17,100	148
Departments/Agencies of 500–1,000 staff			
Natural Resources Institute	4.8	2,500	48
Nat Physical Lab.	5.1	3,500	51
Building Research Establishment	5.2	3,400	52
Office for Standards in Education	5.3	2,700	54
Central Science Lab.	6.1	4,100	62
Cabinet Office	6.8	4,200	68
Planning Inspectorate	6.9	4,000	70
COI (HMT)	6.9	3,600	70
ACAS	8.6	5,600	86
Department of National Heritage	8.6	5,200	87
Scottish Courts Service	9.9	8,000	100
Charity Commission	10.3	6,700	104
Central Vet. Lab.	10.3	6,500	104
Export Credit Guarantee	10.9	5,800	110
Paymaster General	11.6	9,600	117
Departments/Agencies of 200–500 staff			
OPSS	4.5	2,000	45
Civil Service College	4.7	1,300	48
Serious Fraud Office	6.3	2,100	64
Office of Electrical Reg.	6.5	1,500	65
Northern Ireland Office	6.7	1,400	67
Government Centre for Information Systems	6.7	2,300	68
Chessington Computer Centre	7.5	3,100	76
Scottish Courts Administration	7.8	1,600	79
Nat. Engineering Lab.	7.9	1,900	80
PSA	8.1	2,400	82
Treasury Solicitor Department	8.7	3,400	88
Historic Royal Palaces	8.9	3,900	90
Fair Trading Office	9.5	4,000	96

Working days lost through sickness absence 1994

	Average working days lost[1]	*Estimated number of working days lost*[2]	*Index of average working days lost (Civil Service average=100)*
Property Holdings	9.8	4,600	99
Teachers Pensions Agency	10.9	4,000	111
General Registers Office (SO)	11.6	3,000	117
Public Record Office	11.8	3,700	119
Departments/Agencies of <200 staff			
NHS Estates	3.5	400	35
Office of Gas Supply	3.9	200	39
Vehicle Certification Agency	4.8	400	49
Warren Spring Lab.	5.0	300	51
Schools Funding Agency	5.0	1,000	51
Office of Water Services	5.5	900	55
Telecommunications Office	5.6	900	57
Government Actuary Department	5.8	500	58
Government Property Lawyers	6.1	800	62
Occ. Health Service	6.4	600	65
Buying Agency	6.4	700	65
Scottish Prison Service	6.8	800	69
Scottish Records Office	6.9	1,000	70
Friendly Societies Register	7.8	1,400	79
Crown Estate Office	8.5	1,700	86
RASA (OMCS)	10.5	1,500	106
Resettlement Agency	16.1	3,200	163
Royal Mint	18.1	1,000	183

Excludes Departments/agencies with fewer than 50 staff.

[1] *Source:* Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service 1995, OHSA Ltd.

[2] Estimated by OPS from above report.

Working days lost through sickness absence, 1995

	Average working days lost[1]	*Estimated number of working days lost*[2]	*Index of average working days lost (Civil Service average=100)*
Civil Service	10.7	5,125,000	100
Departments/Agencies of >10,000 staff			
Ministry of Defence	8.9	709,200	83
Customs and Excise	9.6	240,400	90
Inland Revenue	10.8	661,100	101
Home Office	11.3	540,000	106
Court Service (LCD)	11.6	127,400	108
Employment Service	12.4	520,600	116
Benefits Agency	12.7	872,300	119
Departments/Agencies of 5,000–10,000 staff			
Defence Research Agency	4.7	40,400	44
Department of Trade and Industry	8.2	69,600	77
Department of Transport	8.7	65,500	81
MAFF	9.1	62,600	85
Scottish Office	9.6	64,000	90
Crown Prosecution Service	9.7	64,000	91
Land Registry	10.5	63,900	98
Contributions Agency	12.5	71,800	117
Child Support Agency	13.4	72,200	125
National Savings Department	16.1	86,700	150
Departments/Agencies of 1,000–5,000 staff			
Meteorological Office	5.7	8,000	53
ADAS (MAFF)	6.2	7,300	58
Ordnance Survey	8.3	16,700	78
Department of Environment	8.3	36,400	78
HM Treasury	8.4	9,300	79
HMSO	8.5	19,500	79
Overseas Development Administration	8.6	18,400	80
Health and Safety Executive	9.1	40,100	85
Central Vet. Lab.	9.4	9,500	88
Vehicle Inspectorate	9.4	12,700	88
Insolvency Service	9.5	15,600	89
IT Services Agency	9.7	30,500	91
Department of Health	9.8	42,900	92
Welsh Office	10.0	21,400	93
DFEE	10.3	22,100	96
Crown Office and Proc. Fiscal	10.4	10,600	97
DSS	10.5	30,500	98
OPCS	11.4	21,700	107
Central Statistical Office	11.5	15,100	107
Employment Department	11.5	50,800	107
Scottish Prison Service	12.5	54,000	117
War Pensions Directorate	13.0	19,300	121
DVLA	13.4	46,000	125
Registers of Scotland	13.6	14,800	127
Driving Standards Agency	16.6	27,800	155
Departments/Agencies of 500–1,000 staff			
Transport Research Lab.	3.7	1,600	35
Natural Resources Institute	4.0	1,900	37
Office of Public Service	4.9	2,700	46
Building Research Estab.	5.6	3,600	52
Central Science Lab.	5.6	3,800	52
Cabinet Office	6.9	4,300	64
Ofsted	7.0	3,600	65
Planning Inspectorate	7.4	4,400	69
ACAS	8.1	5,300	76
Lord Chancellor Dept.	8.7	7,500	81
Dept. of National Heritage	9.8	5,900	92
Paymaster General Office	10.5	7,700	98
Charity Commission	11.3	6,700	106
Scottish Courts Service	12.1	10,500	113
Intervention Board	12.6	12,300	118
Companies House	14.1	13,800	132
Public Trust Office	14.7	7,900	137
Departments/Agencies of 200–500 staff			
Civil Service College	4.1	1,100	38
Schools Funding Agency	4.4	1.100	41
Northern Ireland Office	5.1	1,200	48
Govt. Centre for Info. Systems	5.2	1,500	49
Serious Fraud Office	5.3	1,800	50
Lab. of the Govt. Chemist	5.8	1,600	54
Treasury Solicitors Dept.	6.9	2,800	64
Office of Electrical Reg.	7.1	1,700	66

Working days lost through sickness absence, 1995

	Average working days lost[1]	*Estimated number of working days lost*[2]	*Index of average working days lost (Civil Service average=100)*
Chessington Computer Centre	8.2	3,300	77
Office of Fair Trading	8.4	3,400	79
Historic Royal Palaces	8.6	3,500	80
General Register Office(SO)	9.4	2,200	88
Property Holdings	9.9	4,200	93
Export Credit Guarantee	10.3	4,900	96
COI (HMT)	10.6	5,000	99
Public Record Office	10.6	4,900	99
Departments/Agencies of <200 staff			
Ofgas	3.9	300	36
NHS Estates	5.4	500	50
Vehicle Certification Agency	5.8	400	54
Government Actuary Department	5.8	500	54
PSA	5.8	600	54
Ofwat	6.1	1,00	57
Crown Estate Office	6.5	1,200	61
Telecommunications Office	7.1	1,100	66
Monopolies and Mergers Comm.	7.1	500	66
Scottish Record Office	7.5	1,100	70
Government Property Lawyers	8.5	1,100	79
Occ. Health and Safety Agency	8.6	800	80
Buying Agency	8.9	1,000	83
Nat. Engineering Lab (DTI)	9.4	1,500	88
Scottish Courts Admin.	9.8	1,500	92
RAS	10.8	1,600	101
Friendly Societies Register	11.8	2,00	110
Resettlement Agency	17.2	1,600	161

Excludes Departments/agencies with fewer than 50 staff.

[1] *Source:* Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service 1995, OHSA Ltd.

[2] Estimated by OPS from above report.

Next Steps Agencies

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the next steps agencies which have regional administrative structures. [11363]

Dr. David Clark: The next steps agencies which have regional administrative structures are listed:

Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency
Central Office of Information
Coastguard
Court Service
Defence Dental Agency
Defence Estate Organisation
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency
Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency
Defence Secondary Care Agency
Defence Vetting Agency
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency
Driving Standards Agency
Employment Service
Employment Tribunals Service
Farming and Rural Conservation Agency
Forensic Science Service
Highways Agency
HM Land Registry
HM Prison Service
Insolvency Service
Marine Safety Agency
Meat Hygiene Service
Medical Supplies Agency
Medicines Control Agency
Ministry of Defence Police
NHS Estates
Ordnance Survey
Property Advisers to the Civil Estate
Radiocommunications Agency
Social Security Benefits Agency
Social Security Child Support Agency
Social Security Contributions Agency
Specialist Procurement Services
The Buying Agency
United Kingdom Passport Agency
Valuation Office
Veterinary Laboratories Agency

Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans his Department has to extend benefits currently enjoyed by spouses of members of the principal civil service pension scheme to partners of members who are the same sex or a common law spouse. [11829]

Dr. David Clark: Any extension of benefits would have a cost and could be made only if there is a willingness on the part of scheme members to meet the cost in full.

Civil Servants (Alleged Wrongdoing)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) on how many occasions a civil servant who has reported alleged wrongdoing under the civil service code has reported the matter in writing to the Civil Service Commission; [11814]

(2) on how many occasions since the introduction of the civil service code a civil servant has reported alleged wrongdoing. [11813]

Dr. David Clark: Where a civil servant believes that he or she is being required to act in a way which would be in breach of the Civil Service Code, he or she should report the matter internally in accordance with departmental procedures. If the civil servant involved believes that the response is not a reasonable one, he or she may report the matter in writing to the civil service commissioners.

Two appeals falling within the terms of the civil service code have been investigated by the civil service commissioners and upheld. Details are provided in the commissioners' annual report for 1996–97. A third approach is still the subject of internal departmental procedures. A fourth was resolved within the Department before it became clear whether it fell within the terms of the code.

Information on the number of cases raised under the code, and settled internally within Departments without reference to the commissioners, is not held centrally.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cattle Cull

Mr. Green: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimates his Department has made of the number of over-30-months scheme cattle in Kent requiring incineration over the next three years. [10355]

Mr. Rooker: A designated abattoir in Kent has been awarded a contract to deal with those animals coming forward for slaughter under the scheme in Kent and the neighbouring counties, notably Sussex and part of Hampshire. It is estimated that 25,000 animals over 30 months of age from these counties will be slaughtered in Kent each year. It is not possible to give an estimate of the numbers which will be incinerated over the next three years because the majority of animals being slaughtered under the scheme at the present time are being rendered prior to disposal. However, a carcase incineration facility may be established adjacent to the over-30-months scheme abattoir in Kent which will offer significant efficiencies.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average weight of cattle slaughtered under the over-30-months cattle slaughter scheme; and what proportion of the cattle slaughtered under the scheme exceeded that average weight. [10159]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The average weight of cattle slaughtered under the over-30-months slaughter scheme is 595 kg.

Sixty-three per cent. of cattle presented under the scheme weighed more than 595 kg.

Dr. Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle weighing *(a)* between 560 kg and 609 kg, *(b)* between 610 kg and 659 kg, *(c)* between 660 kg and 709 kg, *(d)* between 710 kg and 759 kg and *(e)* over 760 kg live weight have been slaughtered under the over-30-months cattle slaughter scheme during 1997. [10160]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The information requested is as follows:

Live weight (kg)	*Number of cattle presented liveweight*	*Number of cattle presented deadweight*
560–609	29,500	48,135
610–659	22,809	39,849
660–709	12,929	29,699
710–750	5,813	19,827
Over 760	4,744	27,120

Beaufort's Dyke

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) of 1 July, *Official Report*, columns *158–59*, what radioactive waste has been dumped in the Rockall or Rockall trough areas, other than that already reported to the International Atomic Energy Agency and listed in IAEA–TEC Doc. 558, March 1991. [11357]

Mr. Rooker: I am not aware of any dumping of radioactive waste in those areas other than those reported in the IAEA document and carried out in 1951 and 1953. The search of archive records referred to in my reply of 1 July was in relation to areas not previously recognised as sites for the disposal of radioactive waste.

Food Standards Agency

Mr Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he expects to publish the remit of a food standards agency; [11325]

(2) what will be the composition of the membership of the proposed food standards agency. [11326]

Mr. Rooker: The Government will publish a White Paper in the autumn setting out their detailed proposals for a food standards agency in the light of pubic consultation on Professor Philip James's report.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the Meat Hygiene Service to be incorporated into a new food standards agency. [11324]

Mr. Rooker: The Government are considering all aspects of the structure and remit of the proposed agency, including the question of meat hygiene enforcement, in the light of consultation on Professor James's report. It will publish detailed proposals in a White Paper in the autumn.

Arable Area Payments Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many payments were made under the arable area payments scheme in 1996 of *(a)* £0 to £1,000, *(b)* 1,000 to £5,000, *(c)* £5,000 to £10,000, *(d)* £10,000 to £15,000, *(e)* £15,000 to £20,000, *(f)* £20,000 to £25,000, *(g)* £25,000 to £30,000, *(h)* £30,000 to £40,000, (i) £40,000 to £50,000, *(j)* £50,000 to £75,000, *(k)* £75,000 to £100,000, *(l)* £100,000 to £200,000, *(m)* £200,000 to £500,000, *(n)* £500,000 to £1 million, *(o)* £1 million to £1.5 million and *(p)* £1.5 million to £2 million. [11314]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* The following table sets out the payments made to each claimant by the Ministry under the 1996 arable area payments scheme in the bands requested.

Size band	*Number of claimants*
(a) £0 to £1,000	2,728
(b) £1,000 to £5,000	15,255
(c) £5,000 to £10,000	4,718
(d) £10,000 to £15,000	4,707
(e) £15,000 to £20,000	3,482
(f) £20,000 to £25,000	2,664
(g) £25,000 to £30,000	1,996
(h) £30,000 to £40,000	3,074
(i) £40,000 to £50,000	1,973
(j) £50,000 to £75,000	2,837
(k) £75,000 to £100,000	1,357
(i) £100,000 to £200,000	1,487
(m) £200,000 to £500,000	327

Size band	*Number of claimants*
(n) £500,000 to £1 million	27
(o) £1 million to £1.5 million	4
(p) £1.5 million to £2 million	1

In addition, one claimant received payments totalling over £2 million.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many payments of £1 million or more were made under the arable area payments scheme in 1996. [6300]

Mr. Rooker *[pursuant to his reply, 1 July 1997, c. 158]:* Six.

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste in his Department. [11539]

Mr. Morley: Under the Department's action plan for green housekeeping, there is a requirement on all our sites to minimise the generation of waste. So far, it has not been considered appropriate to set specific targets in what is a diverse and changing departmental estate. Although the scope for setting targets remains under consideration, a series of formal environmental audits of our laboratory sites is planned for later in 1997–98.

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by his Department in each of the last five years. [11540]

Mr. Morley: This information is not available. Paper recycling schemes are in operation at many of the Ministry's 230 sites and the responsibility for handling such schemes is decentralised. At our London headquarters buildings, 37 tonnes of good-quality waste paper was recycled during 1996–97, which considerably exceeded expectations.

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for his Department. [11538]

Mr. Morley: A waste minimisation strategy already forms part of the Department's action plan for green housekeeping, with the objective of reducing the amount of waste produced, encouraging recycling schemes and reusing materials. A leaflet and notices have been issued to all staff and local campaigns have been undertaken to encourage participation, including exhibitions, presentations and the introduction of schemes for recycling paper, tin cans and other materials.

Pigs (Gas Stunning)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library a copy of the advice he received from the Farm Animal Welfare Council on the carbon dioxide gas stunning of pigs. [11827]

Mr. Morley: I have placed in the Library a copy of the letter from the Farm Animal Welfare Council dated 1 May 1997. This says that the council would like MAFF to encourage the industry to develop superior stunning and killing methods which move away from stressful handling and that these should make use of non-aversive gas mixtures. FAWC in its letter further recommended that the industry should concentrate on the use of argon to induce anoxia and that high concentrations of carbon dioxide in air should be phased out as systems using alternative gas mixtures became commercially available.

We have commissioned commercial trials using alternative gas mixtures and the next steps we take will depend on the results of these.

We also await formal proposals from the European Commission to add alternative gas mixtures to the permitted methods for stunning animals.

Office Refurbishment

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for the refurbishment of ministerial offices in his Department; and what is the estimated cost of the works and date of completion. [11870]

Mr. Morley: The current Ministry building in Whitehall which houses ministerial offices is in need of major renovation within the next few years. Ministers, and about 76 officials, will therefore move by the end of November to MAFF offices in Nobel house, Smith square.

Details on costs for this move and associated redecoration works were included in the reply given to the hon. Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin) on 28 July, *Official Report*, columns *23–24*.

Vegetable Oils

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to this answer of 23 July, *Official Report*, column *639*, concerning research into use of crops yielding vegetable oils, if he will list the principal research projects his Department is funding, indicating the cost of each to public funds. [11820]

Mr. Rooker: The information requested is as follows:

Project title	*Total cost (£)*
Genetic engineering of oilseed rape to produce products of defined acyl variation and low downstream processing	320,697
Oilseed rape seed loss-improving strength of pods by using engineering fracture analysis of genetically diverse pods	348,000
Genetic improvement of oilseed rape for reduced susceptibility to pod shatter	607,193
Regulation of pod shatter in oilseed rape	190,210
A knowledge based assessment of rapeseed oil as a pesticide adjuvant	243,261
Vegetable oils with specific fatty acids	87,840
Pesticide adjuvants from vegetable oils	68,092
Cost benefit assessment, including life cycle analysis, of oils produced from UK-grown crops compared with mineral oils	192,754
Comparative field trials of alternative UK road transport fuels	33,520
Linseed agronomy	1,015,216

Cattle Traceability

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) of 19 June, *Official Report*, column *286*, on cattle traceability, when he expects to implement a system which meets the Florence precondition on cattle traceability. [11637]

Mr. Rooker: We believe that the cattle passport system, introduced on 1 July 1996, fulfils the Florence precondition on cattle traceability in Great Britain. However, a computerised system will improve cattle traceability still further, and is required under recent EU legislation which applies to all member states.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what actions his Department is taking to proceed with *(a)* the export certified herds scheme and *(b)* the date-based scheme. [12199]

Mr. Rooker: On 24 July, my officials discussed both schemes with the EU Commission. As a result, further clarification is to be provided on the date-based scheme. In line with the Florence agreement, the Commission will be putting both schemes to its scientific advisory committees.

State Veterinary Service

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many veterinarians are currently employed in the State Veterinary Service; and if he will make a statement on the future of the State Veterinary Service with particular reference to his plans for a food standards agency; [11780]

(2) what plans he has to conduct open consultation with interested organisations in respect of proposed changes to the State Veterinary Service. [11781]

Mr. Morley: At 1 July 1997, the number of veterinarians employed in the State Veterinary Service within the direct line command of the chief veterinary officer was 306.15 full-time equivalents and includes permanent, fixed-term and casual appointees. This total excludes 13 veterinary posts recently transferred to the MAFF food safety and standards group on 2 June 1997 in preparation for the creation of a foods standards agency. It has been decided that the veterinary field service—the operational arm of the SVS—should not at present become an executive agency and I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) on 30 July, *Official Report*, column *322*. The Government's proposals for a food standards agency will be published in a White Paper in the autumn. The White Paper will provide interested bodies with a further opportunity to comment on the organisation and remit of the new agency, including any implications it may have for the State Veterinary Service.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what funding is presently committed from his departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [11899]

Mr. Morley: Current commitments from the central information technology budget to resolve the year 2000 computer problem are:

(a) 1997–98: £2,500,000

(b) 1998–99: £1,400,000

(c) 1999–2000: £750,000

making a total of £4,650,000. Further expenditure—to take the figure up to an estimated £7 million in total—is expected as detailed plans are finalised over the coming month.

Costs will be met from existing public expenditure survey provision. The Department is working in line with guidance published by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency; detailed and costed plans will be supplied by the end of October 1997.

Fishing

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which articles and subsections of articles of Council regulation 3760/92 will automatically continue after 2002; and what is the relevant legal text which substantiates their continuation. [12190]

Mr. Morley: All of Council regulation (EEC) No. 3760/92 apart from article 6 continues automatically until the Council decides to change it. The provisions on access restrictions within six and 12-mile limits are exceptional in that they automatically end on 31 December 2002, but the Government are committed to securing their renewal thereafter.

Article 21 of the regulation says that it entered into force on 1 January 1993. With the exception of article 6, no date is specified in the regulation for any part of it to expire. It therefore continues sine die until the Council decides otherwise.

Camphill Devon Community Ltd.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he plans to make a decision on the eligibility of Camphill Devon Community Ltd. for a farm and conservation grant; and if he will make a statement. [12168]

Mr. Morley: The claim for grant from Camphill Devon Community Ltd. has raised a number of questions concerning the eligibility of the investment on which grant is being claimed under the farm and conservation grant scheme. However, we hope to have resolved these questions shortly.

Performing Animals

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the quarantine arrangements for travelling zoos and circuses involving performing animals. [12084]

Mr. Rooker: Each animal subject to the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order 1974 and imported into Great Britain from outside the British Isles is required to be quarantined for six months. In each case, the physical arrangements of the quarantine premises for containing the animal have to be shown to be satisfactory.

Rams' Horns

Mr. Reed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the British Stickmakers Guild about the classification of rams' horns as animal offal; and if he will make a statement. [10556]

Mr. Rooker *[pursuant to his answer, 28 July 1997, c.24]:* I have received representations from the British Stickmakers Guild about the classification of rams' horns as animal offal.

Under the Heads of Sheep and Goats Order 1996, the heads—excluding the tongue—of sheep and goats of any age other than those born, reared and slaughtered in Australia and New Zealand must be disposed of as specified waste material. This would include the horns if still attached to the head. However, horns themselves are not considered to be a risk, provided they are removed without breaking into the cranial cavity in order to ensure that there is no risk of contamination with brain material.

Fisheries (Rockall)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the potential fish catches and stocks in the 60,000 sq miles of ocean around Rockall; and what funding the Government have made available in the last 20 years to research and develop the potential of these waters. [11581]

Mr. Chisholm: I have been asked to reply.

I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what licensing arrangements currently apply to fishing operators in the 60,000 sq miles of Atlantic ocean around Rockall; how many *(a)* British and *(b)* Spanish fishing vessels operate there; and what estimate he has made of the number of British vessels with the capacity to fish waters of these depths. [11577]

Mr. Chisholm: I have been asked to reply.

United Kingdom vessels fishing within the current Rockall fisheries zone must be in possession of a UK fishing licence, while vessels from other EC member states are subject to their own national licensing and management arrangements. All such vessels are subject to quota restrictions and western waters effort ceilings where appropriate. This will remain the case following the redrawing of British fisheries limits.

Landings information held by the fisheries departments shows that, in 1996, 46 British vessels operated in the waters affected by the change. Comparable information for Spanish vessels is not held by the fisheries departments.

Information on the number of vessels capable of fishing in deep waters around Rockall is not held centrally.

Vitamin Supplements

Mr. Allan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has further to review the scientific evidence relating to the safety of vitamin B6 supplementation; and if he will make a statement. [11719]

Mr. Rooker: The scientific evidence relating to the safety of vitamin B6 has been reviewed by Department of Health's independent Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment—COT—on two separate occasions. I have every confidence in the ability of the COT and in the quality of its advice and I have no plans to invite it or any other body to undertake a further review.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the dangers to public health of higher dose vitamin B6 supplements. [10956]

Ms Jowell: The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment—COT—has considered the toxicity of vitamin B6 on two occasions. The committee reviewed the scientific papers published in national and international journals and noted reports of peripheral sensory neuropathy in humans. There was evidence of nerve damage in animals. It recommended that the level of vitamin B6 in dietary supplements be limited to 10 mg per day. This recommendation applies to supplements sold under food law.

In the light of the COT's recommendation, the Medicines Control Agency's Committee on Safety of Medicines reviewed vitamin B6 containing medicinal products and recommended that those sold on the general sales list—GSL, that is, those freely available to the public—should be limited to 10 mg, while those above 10 mg and below 50 mg should be available under the supervision of a pharmacist while those of 50 mg and above should be available under the supervision of a doctor—prescription only medicines.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has evaluated into the number of deaths or cases of adverse health reactions in the last 10 years in America arising from higher dose vitamin B6 supplementation; and if he will make a statement. [10942]

Ms Jowell: The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment—COT—has considered the toxicity of vitamin B6 on two occasions. Lists of the references from national and international scientific journals which it considered are lodged in the Library. Following its consideration, the COT published a statement on 4 July 1997. Officials have no specific information on adverse health reactions to higher dose vitamin B6 products in America, but in the years 1987–96 the UK yellow card adverse drug reaction—ADR—reporting scheme administered by the Medicines Control Agency has received a total of 42 reactions associated with products containing only vitamin B6.

TREASURY

Foreign Income Dividends

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about his proposals to abolish foreign income dividends; and if he will make a statement. [8928]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 21 July, *Official Report*, column *445*. We have received several representations from United Kingdom-owned companies that obtain a high proportion of their profits from overseas, and as my hon. Friend the Paymaster General stated in Standing Committee on the Finance Bill on 22 July, we welcome their views and shall find a way froward that balances the interests of the Exchequer with those of the companies involved.

Windfall Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on the future use of windfall taxes. [11472]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The windfall tax is a one-off tax.

Indirect and Corporate Taxation

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the proposals contained in CSE (97) 1 final 9000/97 relating to *(a)* the elimination of significant distortion in the area of indirect taxation and *(b)* the longer-term need to look at further elements of corporate taxation. [9652]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 21 July 1997]:* The Government welcome the commitment by member states to consider measures to eliminate significant distortions in the area of indirect taxation. In particular, we are keen to see progress on alcohol and tobacco duties where significant cross-border trade is distorted by varying rates of duty.

Privatised Industries

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount at current prices paid in taxes by privatised firms *(a)* in the most recent year for which figures are available and *(b)* since 1979. [10920]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Corporation tax paid by formerly publicly owned companies since 1987-88 is as follows:

Year	*£ billion*
1987–88	1.5
1988–89	1.6
1989–90	1.5
1990–91	2.1
1991–92	2.3
1992–93	2.3
1993–94	1.9
1994–95	2.5
1995–96	2.9
1996–97	2.7

Release of earlier figures would infringe taxpayer confidentiality.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue the formerly nationalised industries have contributed to the Exchequer since privatisation. [11340]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and Poole, North (Mr. Fraser) regarding Exchequer receipts of corporation tax paid by formerly publicly owned companies.

Nationalised Industries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the annual profits and losses of the nationalised industries in current prices for each year between 1974 and 1997. [11350]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. John Bercow, dated 31 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the annual profits and losses of the nationalised industries in the current prices for each year between 1974 and 1997.

I regret to say that estimates of profits/losses of the nationalised industries are not produced.

For the National Accounts, the nationalised industries are classified within the Public Corporations sector. As of April 1997, the nationalised industries were as follows:

British Coal Board

Magnox Electric

British Railways Board

London Region Transport

Highlands Islands Airports

British Nuclear Fuels

Post Office

Civil Aviation Authority

British Waterways Board

Caledonian MacBrayne

The Public Corporations sector also contains many other bodies, e.g. NHS trusts, the BBC, Channel 4, and urban development corporations. The composition of the sector has changed significantly, over the period from 1974, particularly with privatisations.

The National Accounts definition of the United Kingdom profits, losses of Public Corporations is entitled to the gross trading surplus (this is gross of depreciation). It would be possible to construct gross trading surplus aggregates for the nationalised industries from 1991 to 1996 only, but this would be at disproportionate cost. Data before 1991 are unavailable.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) does not publish data for the gross trading surplus of the Public Corporations sector as a whole. This series goes back to 1946 but is affected by breaks due to sectoral reclassifications, including privatisation, nationalisation and the establishment of NHS trusts. I attach a table of the data from 1974 to 1996. This data, from 1986 onwards, will appear in the 1997 edition of *United Kingdom National Accounts* which is being published on 8 August. Gross trading surplus data for 1997 are not yet available.

Gross trading surplus of public corporations

Year	*Current prices (£ million)*
1974	2,561
1975	3,094
1976	4,505
1977	5,095
1978	5,466
1979	5,710
1980	6,309
1981	7,974
1982	9,502
1983	10,004
1984	8,511
1985	7,262
1986	8,213
1987	6,993
1988	7,554
1989	5,951
1990	3,426
1991	1,410
1992	1,699
1993	2,438
1994	2,698
1995	4,230
1996	3,959

BSE

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update the figures contained in table 5A.4 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98", showing projected United Kingdom expenditure on BSE for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [11186]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The provision made for expenditure on BSE remains as in that table, supplemented by a further £0.2 billion spread over 1996–97 and 1997–98 in respect of the selective cull of animals most at risk of developing BSE announced on 16 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *632*. The actual outturns will depend on a variety of factors, including some policy decisions that have not yet been taken.

EU Budget

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the net benefit to the United Kingdom at today's prices in each year as a result of the budget rebate of 1984. [11234]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the abatement agreed at Fontainebleau. The table sets out the information requested.

	Value of UK's abatement, in current prices (£ million)
1985–86	1,346
1986–87	2,131
1987–88	1,713
1988–89	2,260
1989–90	1,739
1990–91	2,247
1991–92	2,791
1992–93	2,198
1993–94	2,519
1994–95	1,740
1995–96	1,620
1996–97	2,418

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the net level of United Kingdom contributions to the European Community for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement; [11306]

(2) if he will update the figure for the estimated net United Kingdom contribution to the European Community budget for 1998–99, in table 5A.4, page 123, of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98", incorporating the impact of developments at the European Union budget negotiations on 24 July; and if he will make a statement. [11612]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The Government's expenditure plans take account of the plans of the previous Government for the forecast of the trend in the United Kingdom's net contributions to the European Community budget; as published in the previous Chancellor's departmental report on his smaller departments, Cm 3617. The forecasts are as follows:

1997–98: £2,750 million

1998–99: £3,000 million

1990–2000: £3,400 million

The Treasury will revise the forecasts in due course. As the Community budget for 1998 has not yet been finalised, there is no reason at this stage to update these forecasts.

Generalised System of Preferences

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to receive the European Commission's report on the abuse of the generalised system of preferences. [10141]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 22 July 1997]:* The European Commission has indicated that its study on the post-clearance recovery of customs debts associated with preferential customs schemes—including the generalised system of preferences—will be published in the early autumn.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of United Kingdom businesses affected by claims to retrospective duties arising from irregularities found in origin certificates issued by developing countries under the generalised system of preferences. [10143]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 22 July 1997]:* In the 12 months ending 30 June 1997, some 70 UK businesses were notified of a duty liability as a result of invalid claims to preferential rates of duty under the generalised system of preferences.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the level of outstanding duty arising from the irregularities found in origin certificates issued by developing countries under the generalised system of preferences. [10142]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 22 July 1997]:* Approximately £1,600,000 duty is outstanding in respect of irregularities found in the past five years in origin certificates issued under the generalised system of preferences.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure that an agreement made between Bangladesh and the EC concerning invalid origin certificates under the generalised system of preferences does not disadvantage United Kingdom businesses. [10144]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 22 July 1997]:* Importers in a number of member states have received invalid origin certificates from Bangladesh. Her Majesty's Customs and Excise will seek to ensure that action taken in respect of these documents is consistent throughout the Community and it will continue to press for a fair and equitable solution to the problem.

Welsh Assembly

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what powers the Treasury will have to ring-fence itemised expenditure under the process described in paragraph 1.22 of the White Paper on a Welsh Assembly; and if these powers will extend to the determination of individual subheads within the estimates. [10707]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The allocation of the budget assigned to Wales will be at the discretion of the Welsh Assembly, as it is at present a matter for the Secretary of State for Wales.

European Central Bank

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's policy towards an independent European central bank. [11822]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Budget (Environmental Impact)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to publish a green book on the environmental implications of the next Budget. [11861]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer I gave to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), on 10 July, *Official Report,* column 1062.

Tobacco Duty

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce banding for the tobacco products duty on cigarettes related to their nicotine content; and if he will make a statement. [11313]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* EC law requires that all cigarettes sold within a EU member state shall be subject to the same rate of excise duty. It would not therefore be possible to band tobacco products duty in this way.

Financial Services (Distance Selling)

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce legislation on the distance selling of financial services. [11784]

Mr. Darling: None. The Government will of course consider any draft directive covering distance selling of financial services which may be proposed by the European Commission. However, no such draft has been issued.

Travel-to-work Areas

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will amend the travel-to-work area boundaries to coincide with the new local government boundaries; and if he will make a statement. [11218]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. David Marshall, dated 30 July 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to your recent question on travel-to-work area boundaries.

A recent consultation exercise by the ONS has shown a demand for statistics for travel-to-work areas (TTWAs) as well as for local authority areas. ONS has accordingly decided to continue to produce statistics for TTWAs and is now consulting on revised boundaries.

Investors Compensation Scheme

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received concerning the investors compensation scheme from investors who made their investments prior to the formation of the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [11907]

Mrs. Liddell: I receive such representations from time to time.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the qualifying conditions for a claim under the investors compensation scheme; and if he will make a statement. [11906]

Mrs. Liddell: The eligibility of any claim on the investors compensation scheme will depend on the individual circumstances. However, the following general conditions must be met:

the claimant is a private investor;

the investment firm must have been fully authorised before it failed;

the claim arises out of business regulated under the Financial Services Act;

the firm owes the investor money—through fraud or negligent dealing—or was holding shares or other investments on the investor's behalf;

the firm cannot pay out investors' claims;

the firm has been declared in default by the ICS.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what funding is presently committed from his departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [11967]

Mr. Darling: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 10 July 1997, *Official Report*, column 609.

Financial Services Regulation

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in discussions with the Bank of England regarding the role of the registrar's department after the change in responsibility for debt management from the Bank of England to the Treasury. [11725]

Mr. Darling: The Treasury and the Bank have agreed that the status of the registrar's department will not be affected by other changes on debt management, and this has been announced to staff. The registrar's department will remain under Bank of England management and continue with the current programming of restructuring. The options over its future will then be reviewed in five years.

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the new supervisory body for the financial sector will have responsibility for supervising *(a)* friendly societies, *(b)* credit unions and *(c)* cheque traders. [11731]

Mr. Darling: As my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary announced in a written answer on 23 July, *Official Report*, column 595, the new regulatory organisation will have responsibility for supervising friendly societies and credit unions. We have no plans at present to extend financial regulation to cheque traders.

Financial Services Regulators

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has received from Sir Andrew Large an implementation plan for the new financial regulatory body announced on 20 May. [12271]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I received the plan on 29 July. Copies have been placed in the Vote Office, together with copies of a letter from Sir Andrew and my reply.

Treasury Supplement

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the amount of the Treasury supplement in each of the last 10 years; and what are the estimated figures for the next two years. [11715]

Mr. Darling: The Treasury supplement to the national insurance fund was abolished in 1989. From 1993, a new Treasury grant was introduced, and the level of that annual grant has been as follows:

1993–94: £7,589 million

1994–95: £6,280 million

1995–96: £3,575 million

As part of his report to the Secretary of State for Social Security on the 1997 uprating and rerating orders, the Government Actuary has estimated the size of the Treasury grant needed for 1996–97 and 1997–98 to be £1,925 million and £980 million respectively.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new advice he plans to provide to people with approved personal pension plans in respect of the amount they contribute to those plans following the abolition of advance corporation tax credits. [11653]

Dawn Primarolo: None.

National Audit Office

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future role of the National Audit Office in relation to auditing the Budget. [11602]

Mr. Darling: As part of the opening up of economic decision making, the Chancellor intends that there should be a continuing role for the National Audit Office in subsequent Budgets. Future arrangements are not yet settled.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to announce new public expenditure plans for 1999–2000 and beyond; and if he will make a statement. [11606]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Spending plans for 1999–2000 and beyond will be announced next year after the Government have concluded the comprehensive spending review announced by the Chief Secretary on 11 June.

Departmental Spending Limits

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if further changes to departmental spending ceilings for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 will be made; and if he will make a statement. [11607]

Mr. Darling: Departments are expected to live within the ceilings currently set for the next two years.

National Lottery

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the effect on the public sector borrowing requirement in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 to date and *(d)* 1997–98 of the discrepancy between the timing of receipts and disbursements relating to the national lottery to and from the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement. [11994]

Mr. Darling: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Low Pay

Mr. Pond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many and what proportion of *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees and *(c)* all employees on adult rates of pay in the south-east and Greater London as a whole and broken down by county, unitary authority and London borough, have earnings excluding overtime payments of less than (i) £3.50 an hour and (ii) £4.42 an hour; and if he will list these figures separately for men and for women; [12191]

(2) how many and what proportion of all employees on adult rates of pay in the south-east and Greater London have earnings excluding overtime payments of less than (i) £3.50 an hour (ii) £4.42 an hour broken down by standard occupational classification and by standard industrial classification; [12192]

(3) how many and what proportion of *(a)* full-time, *(b)* part-time and *(c)* all employees on adult rates of pay working in social work activities in Great Britain have earnings excluding overtime payments of less than (i) £4.26 an hour and (ii) £4.42 an hour. [12088]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Construction Workers

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to align the tax and national insurance treatment of construction workers who provide their services through an agency. [12272]

Dawn Primarolo: The exemption for construction workers from the agency tax rules will be removed with effect from 6 April 1998. So agencies that supply workers to the construction industry will, subject to the conditions set out in these rules, be required to operate pay-as-you-earn on payments to construction workers in the same way as other agency workers. Agencies are, of course, already obliged to account for employer and employees class 1 national insurance contributions, provided the relevant conditions are satisfied.

Tax Law Rewrite Project

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made on the tax law rewrite project. [12273]

Dawn Primarolo: I am delighted to report that the tax law rewrite project continues to make good progress. The Inland Revenue has today published the project's first exposure draft containing draft clauses. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House. A number of innovative techniques have been adopted. The rewritten legislation incorporates easier to understand language, a more logical structure and shorter sentences.

I very much support this important project, which aims to bring clarity and certainty in our direct tax legislation for businesses and individuals. Full consultation is the key to its success, and I urge everyone with an interest in tax law to take this opportunity to comment.

Office Refurbishment

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the refurbishment of ministerial offices in his Department; and what is the estimated cost of the works and the date of completion. [11868]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: There are no plans to refurbish any ministerial offices in the Treasury.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the proposal to refurbish the Treasury building in Great George street under the private finance initiative. [12274]

Mr. Robinson: At a time when all Departments are undertaking comprehensive spending reviews and are subject to extremely tight expenditure controls, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was unwilling to embark on a major construction project of this scale, which would have involved substantial expenditure and significant financial risks for the other Government occupants of the building in terms of the disposal of property elsewhere. The plans to refurbish the main Treasury building under the private finance initiative represented good value for money in their own terms, but Ministers judged they had to have regard to wider considerations.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has therefore decided to terminate negotiations with our private sector partner, Exchequer Partnership plc.

Securities and Investments Board

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the financial position of the Securities and Investments Board. [12326]

Mr. Darling: The Treasury has today laid a minute to inform the House that the Treasury has issued a non-statutory guarantee to the Securities and Investments Board for up to £8 million.

This exceptional course is necessary to ensure that SIB is able to raise a commercial loan in order to finance work on preparation for assuming additional regulatory responsibilities after Royal Assent to the legislation announced in the Chancellor's statement of 20 May. SIB cannot use the fees that it raises under the current powers in the Financial Services Act 1986 for this purpose. The process of transition is described in more detail in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's reply of today to my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham. In particular, the documents mentioned in that reply make it clear that SIB, and its successor, will receive no support from public funds.

The guarantee will cover a loan sufficient for all SIB's preparation costs which can be foreseen now. This sum does not at this stage cover accommodation. The guarantee may therefore need to be extended at some point in the future, in which case I will notify Parliament of it.

The guarantee will remain in place until SIB obtains powers under the legislation to reform the financial regulatory system, to recoup its operational costs from the industry it regulates. This power will apply to the cost of transition as well as to SIB's on-going administrative costs. It is thus likely that SIB will need the guarantee for at least two years. I will ensure that the contingent liability continues for as short a period as possible. While the liability is outstanding, Parliament will be kept informed in the usual way.

VAT (Fuel)

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 15 July, *Official Report*, column *136*, concerning the fine tuning of his modelling of the consequences of reducing value added tax on domestic fuel, if he will estimate the weekly benefit of the reduction, net of the consequential lower uprating of pension benefits next April, to an average *(a)* single pensioner, *(b)* pensioner couple and *(c)* single householder on average earnings. [9450]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 18 July 1997]:* The change in the VAT rate on domestic fuel will have no impact on the real value of the basic state pension. We are committed to uprating the basic state pension at least in line with prices and will consider the uprating of benefits at the normal time and in the normal way.

Households will on average gain £18 a year from the reduction in VAT on domestic fuel from 8 to 5 per cent.

Income Tax

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people paid income tax in *(a)* 1978–79 and *(b)* 1997–98; and how many people would have been paying income tax in 1997–98 if the tax regime had been indexed and maintained at 1978–79 levels. [10895]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Estimated number of taxpayers are given in the table. This comparison is hypothetical since if an indexed version of the 1978–79 tax regime had prevailed over the last 19 years the income base would not have grown in the way it has.

	Number of individuals paying tax (million)
1978–79	25.9
1997–98[1]	24.6
1978–79 indexed regime on 1997–98 income base[1]	27.4

[1] The effect of changes in mortgage interest relief cannot be included in this comparison because most mortgage interest relief is now given at source and therefore is not recorded on individual tax records.

Disposable Incomes

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 July, *Official Report*, column *591*, on changes in disposable income, for what reason the effects of indirect tax changes including excise duties, in the July 1997 Budget were not included in his answer. [11367]

Mr. Geofrey Robinson *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The hon. Member asked for the percentage change in after-tax disposable income. Disposable income is generally defined in economic literature as personal income minus personal taxes, where personal taxes consist of inheritance taxes, property taxes and personal income taxes. Disposable income is that part of income which households may use in any way they wish. The amount of indirect taxes paid depends upon what individual households choose to consume—for instance, those households who choose to spend their income on cigarettes will pay more indirect tax than those who choose to spend their income on books.

For estimates of the effects of the tax changes, including indirect taxes, announced in the Budget, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) on 16 July *Official Report*, columns *167–68*.

Public Sector Pay

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to make an announcement on Government guidelines for the next public sector pay round; and if he will make a statement. [11373]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The evidence to the pay review bodies will include evidence on economic considerations and public sector pay. We expect to publish it in the autumn.

Income Tax (Covenants)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the amount of income tax recovered by charities or charitable covenants for the latest year available. [10766]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* Income tax repayments and payments of tax credits to charities were £755 million in 1996–97, of which around £250 million were repayments at the basic rate of tax for donations under deeds of covenant.

EU Budget

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the percentage nominal increase in the United Kingdom's gross sterling gross national product-based contribution between the 1998 outturn EU budget and the 1996 outturn EU budget on the assumptions that *(a)* the adopted budget for 1998 is identical to the preliminary draft budget for 1998, *(b)* there is no underspending by the EC in 1997 and *(c)* the sterling-ecu exchange rate as at 31 December 1997 is 1.3644 ecu to £1. [11118]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the reforms made to the EU budget process since 1979; and if he will make a statement about their impact on the United Kingdom. [11233]

Mr. Robinson: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

EU Funds (Fraud)

Mr. Frabricant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps have been taken to eliminate fraud in the United Kingdom in respect of EU funds during the last five years; and with what results. [11237]

Mrs. Liddell: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Personal Equity Plans

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans to continue personal equity plans and tax-exempt special savings accounts beyond 1999; and if he will make a statement. [11469]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in his Budget that a new individual savings account will be introduced in 1999. This will extend the principle of TESSAs and PEPs to encourage people, through tax reliefs, to raise the level of their long-term savings. Individuals, including PEP investors, will have the opportunity during 1999 to switch to the individual savings account, which will provide a tax-free environment for savings. Consideration is being given, in consultation with interested parties, to the scope of a tax-free environment for savings after 1999. A consultative document will be published later in the year.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of individuals who have invested in personal equity plans where the value of the investment is *(a)* more than £1 million, *(b)* between £500,000 and £999,999, (c) between £100,000 and £499,999 and *(d)* between £25,000 and £99,999 and if he will make a statement. [11470]

Mr. Robinson: This information requested is not available. PEP investors do not have to give details of the plans they hold onto their tax office; and PEP plan managers are not required to list the current value of individual plans when making their returns to the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the total effect of the tax reliefs on tax-exempt special savings accounts and personal equity plans on the aggregate level of savings in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [11471]

Mr. Robinson: Research suggests that most of the funds going into TESSAs do not represent new savings, with a considerable amount coming from other deposit accounts, but for PEPs there may be a somewhat greater element of new equity investment. The new individual savings accounts will be attractive to a wider range of savers. Extension to those with little or no financial savings at present should make them more effective in attracting new savings.

Pensioners (Fuel Costs)

Mr Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 July, *Official Report*, column *595*, what effect he expects the reduction of VAT on domestic fuel to have on *(a)* the retail prices index increase in Septemberr 1997 and *(b)* the basic pension uprating in April 1998, assuming that the uprating is in line with prices and average earnings respectively. [11492]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* The effect of reducing VAT on domestic fuel from 8 to 5 per cent. would be to reduce retail prices index inflation by 0.12 percentage points. The state retirement pension is uprated in April of each year by the annual RPI inflation rate for the preceding September. Uprating by the RPI reflects the changes in prices paid for goods and services; so the real value of the pension is not affected.

Duty-Free Shopping

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Government's policy towards duty-free shopping in the United Kingdom. [11589]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The Government's policy is in line with international customs agreements to which the United Kingdom is a party and under which individuals travelling abroad are entitled to purchase goods duty and tax free, up to specified quantitive or monetary limits. Duty-free shopping for intra-EU travellers is due to be abolished on 30 June 1999 in line with the decision taken by the Council of Finance Ministers towards the end of 1991. Duty-free shopping will, however, continue to be available to those travelling to destinations outside the European Union.

North Sea Oil and Gas

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the time scale is for reporting the findings of the joint Treasury/Inland Revenue/DTI review of the North sea taxation regime announced in the Budget. [11519]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *15*.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the last review of the North sea taxation regime was carried out; and if he will make a statement. [11520]

Mr. Robinson: That is a matter for the previous Government. The last time that a significant set of changes were made to the North sea fiscal regime was in March 1993.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to consult independent organisations in the review of North sea taxation announced in the Budget. [11522]

Mr. Robinson: Interested parties are being given an opportunity to put forward their views. Officials have written to a number of representative bodies to that end.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what ways he plans to consult the offshore oil and gas industry during the current review of the North sea taxation regime. [11521]

Mr. Robinson: Interested parties are being given the opportunity to put forward their views. Officials have written to a number of representative bodies to that end.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which companies or individuals have contributed their views to the review of North sea taxation announced in the Budget. [11523]

Mr. Robinson: The review was announced on 2 July, some four weeks ago. I understand that no interested parties have chosen to make their detailed views known as yet.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which individuals or companies are being asked to contribute expert studies to the current review of North sea taxation. [11524]

Mr. Robinson: Interested parties are being given the opportunity to put forward their views. Officials have written to a number of representative bodies to that end. We have also asked the advice of an academic on certain specific issues. The review will take the views of commentators into consideration.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are being taken to consider the environmental implications of any changes to the North sea taxation regime as part of the review announced in the Budget. [11525]

Mr. Robinson: As has been made clear on numerous occasions, concern for the environment is at the heart of all Government policy making.

Small Businesses

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the need for funding to assist small businesses in respect of equity gaps. [11788]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The Government fully recognise the need for small firms to be able to obtain appropriate forms of finance. In the Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced plans to sharpen the focus of the venture capital trust scheme and keep it under review to ensure that it remained properly targeted, while encouraging and rewarding risk taking by individuals.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the advantages of introducing tax incentives to encourage business to corporate venturing in relation to the provision of funding for capital high-technology and other small business projects. [11819]

Mr. Robinson: There is no clear evidence of a market failure in respect of corporate venturing by businesses. Nor is it certain that any market failure could be properly addressed by offering a tax incentive. But the Government recognise the importance of the small business sector, particularly high-technology businesses, and are determined to pursue policies which create a climate in which enterprise can flourish.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response the Treasury has made to the Bank of England's October 1996 report on the financing of technology-based small firms. [12238]

Mr. Robinson: The Government agree with a number of recommedations in the Bank of England's report and are reviewing the loan guarantee scheme with a view to improving access for new high-technology start-up firms, within the existing resources of the scheme.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to amend the enterprise initiative scheme and venture capital trust schemes to improve the availability of start-up and second-round funding for smaller businesses. [12236]

Mr. Robinson: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor recognises the progress the EIS and VCT schemes have made in raising investment for early stage and expending businesses. In his Budget, the Chancellor announced plans to sharpen the focus of the EIS and VCT schemes and intends to keep both schemes under review to ensure they remain properly targeted, while encouraging and rewarding risk taking by individuals.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to encourage the provision of equity for start-ups in the small business sector and for high-technology small ventures. [12235]

Mr. Robinson: The Government fully recognise the need for small firms to be able to obtain appropriate forms of finance. We are currently reviewing the loan guarantee scheme to improve access for new high-technology start-up firms, within the existing resources of the scheme.

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste within his Department. [11533]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The Treasury has not set any waste minimisation targets but intends to do so in August 1997.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for his Department. [11532]

Mr. Robinson: The Treasury intends to have a waste minimisation strategy in place by August 1997.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by his Department in each of the last five years. [11534]

Mr. Robinson: The Treasury introduced a white paper recycling scheme in 1993. This scheme was extended to include newspapers in 1996 and the amounts recycled are as follows:

	Financial year	*Kg*
White paper	1993–94	7,230
	1994–95	9,680
	1995–96	5,490
	1996–97	5,600
Newspapers	1996–97	2,400

It is not possible to determine the proportion of total waste that this represents.

Tax and Benefits System

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the members of the committee reviewing the tax and benefits system headed by Mr. Martin Taylor. [11124]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The task force headed by Martin Taylor is comprised of senior officials from HM Treasury, the Inland Revenue, the Department of Social Security and the Department for Education and Employment. The review will draw on other Departments as necessary.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements are being made to encourage external submissions to the review on the tax and benefit system headed by Mr. Martin Taylor. [11126]

Mr. Robinson *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* External submissions are welcome from all sources, and a number have already been received.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the review of the tax and benefit system headed by Mr. Martin Taylor to be published. [11110]

Mr. Robinson *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* I expect Martin Taylor's project to last about a year.

Auctioneers

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on the imposition of value added tax at 17.5 per cent. on *(a)* auctioneers' services and *(b)* imported works of art and antiques; and if he will make a statement. [11584]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Goods imported into the UK normally bear VAT at the standard rate [illegible]7.5 per cent. Under the terms of a derogation from the sixth VAT directive, as amended by the seventh VAT directive, certain works of art, antiques and collectors' pieces are eligible until 30 June 1999 for an effective rate of VAT at importation of 2.5 per cent. After that date, the UK should increase the VAT rate to at least the normal minimum reduced rate of 5 per cent.

Supplies of auctioneers' services to persons in the UK are normally liable to VAT at the standard rate of 17.5 per cent. Special arrangements apply when auctioneers' services are supplied in respect of certain works of art and so on held under temporary importation conditions and eligible for the effective rate of VAT of 2.5 per cent. on permanent importation. In these cases all auctioneers' services are taxed at the same effect rate of VAT as the goods themselves, though this is currently the subject of challenge by the European Commission.

Investors Compensation Scheme

Mr. Öpik: To ask the chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to allow claims to be made under the investors compensation scheme where the initial investment predates the formation of the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [11908]

Mrs. Liddell: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the responsibilities of *(a)* Her Majesty's Treasury and *(b)* the Bank of England regarding work on EMU and the single currency. [11726]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: HM Treasury is the Department responsible for Government policy regarding economic and monetary union. On 24 July, HM Treasury published a booklet to inform businesses about the practical implications of EMU, which will arise whether or not the United Kingdom joins the single currency. The Treasury has also recently announced the establishment of an advisory group of private sector representatives to provide a two-way exchange between the Government and business about the practical effects of EMU.

The Bank of England participates fully in the work of the European Monetary Institute. The Governor is a member of the Council of the EMI. The Bank of England will continue to be responsible for co-ordinating preparations in the financial sector, especially the wholesale financial markets which will need to be able to use the euro whether or not the United Kingdom joins the single currency.

Government Expenditure

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of general Government consumption between spending programmes in cash. [11639]

Mr. Darling: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if the rebate for contracting out of SERPs was calculated by the Government Actuary on the basis of prospective investment yields after tax; [11651]

(2) if he will take action against those providers of approved personal pensions who fail to review whether personal pension holders should opt back into the state earnings-related pensions scheme following the abolition of advance corporation tax credits; [11601]

(3) what estimate was made in the Budget forecasts of the number of people who will opt back into the state earnings-related pensions scheme as a result of the abolition of advance corporation tax credits; [11652]

(4) what estimate he has made of the revenue impact over the next five years from people opting back into state earnings-related pensions scheme following the abolition of advance corporation tax credits. [11654]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: It is too early to assess the overall effects of the Budget tax changes on pension funds.

Offshore Trusts

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the tax advantages which exist under pre-March 1991 overseas trusts. [11645]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The Chancellor announced in his Budget a wide-ranging review of all areas of tax avoidance.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the amount of corporation tax revenue which is lost from the use of Channel Island trusts by British companies for executive incentive programmes in the last financial year. [11646]

Mr. Robinson: There are no special corporation tax allowances or exemptions for British companies which remunerate their executives through incentive programmes, whether or not such programmes involve the use of Channel Islands trusts.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to discourage the placing by British companies of shares related to executive incentive schemes in offshore trusts. [11647]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Warrington Valuation Office

Helen Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) by how much income exceeded expenditure at Warrington valuation office in 1996–97; [11592]

(2) if the Warrington valuation office has sufficient surplus capacity to accommodate staff and files transferred from Bolton; [11593]

(3) how long he estimates it will take for Warrington valuation office to generate enough surplus income to cover the estimated costs of refurbishment. [11594]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the displacement rate resulting from private sector substitution involving employees subsidised through his welfare-to-work proposals; what estimate he has made of the deadweight costs involved in such proposals; and if he will make a statement; [11604]

(2) if he will estimate the welfare benefit and other savings resulting from the welfare-to-work proposals in his Budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [11603]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown of the total expenditure on the new deal for young people for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99, to show expenditure on (i) payments to employers, (ii) payments to trainers, (iii) payments to new deal clients, (iv) administration costs and (v) other costs; and if he will make a statement. [11605]

Mrs. Liddell: I regret that it has not been possible to provide a substantive answer before the summer recess. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Diesel

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many litres of *(a)* ultra-low-sulphur diesel and *(b)* normal diesel fuel were sold in each of the last five years. [12227]

Dawn Primarolo: The total amount of diesel released for consumption in the last five years was:

	Million litres
1992–93	13,260
1993–94	14,170
1994–95	15,529
1995–96	16,479
1996–97	17,303

Separate figures for ultra-low-sulphur diesel and normal diesel fuel are not available.

DEFENCE

Ships Support Agency

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Royal Navy's Ships Support Agency for 1997–98. [12460]

Mr. Spellar: The Ships Support Agency was launched as an agency in December 1996. It is responsible for directing in-service support of surface ships and submarines and their equipments; for ensuring that proper consideration is given to support issues and marine engineering design requirements in the procurement of new naval platforms; and for the ownership and management of the naval stores inventory, except for fuel and food.

The Ships Support Agency has developed a comprehensive set of performance indicators in conjunction with its owners and customers. These include measures to monitor the quality, timeliness and efficiency of the agency's outputs. The targets which have been agreed, for the period up to March 1998, are:

Performance indicator	*Targets*
Materially available vessel days (MAVDs) 1. To provide the Royal Navy with the agreed percentage of materially available vessel days.	62 per cent.
Pounds per MAVD 2. To provide the agreed Fleet availability cost-effectively.	£55.5K per MVAD
To introduce a refined pounds per MAVD performance indicator 3. To introduce a refined pounds per MAVD performance indicator to provide a more robust measurement of the SSA's efficiency.	March 1998
Upkeep period timeliness 4. To deliver upkeep periods within specified tolerances of the agreed programme.	+5 per cent.
Upkeep period costs 5. To contain the cost of programmed upkeep periods within tolerance of the predicted costs.	+/–4 per cent.
Upkeep material performance 6. To introduce a performance indicator to quantify material state at the conclusion of upkeep periods. Progress report.	March 1998
Fleet time material performance 7. To limit the average number of outstanding Operational Defects per vessel in Fleet Time.	4
8. To introduce a performance indicator based on the percentage of Fleet Time that vessels are unable for material reasons to carry out their programmed task.	March 1998
Efficient stockholding 9. To improve stockholding to issue ratio.	2.5:1
Resource accounting 10. To ensure the implementation of the MoD accruals accounting system within the Agency. Progress report.	March 1998
Through life costs 11. To create an effective Through Life Cost model.	March 1998
Private sector involvement 12. To complete a review of the options for further Private Sector Involvement in the support of vessels, equipments and weapons. Progress report.	March 1998

Defence Intelligence and Security Centre

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre for 1997–98. [12207]

Mr. Spellar: The role of the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre is to train the armed forces and other intelligence agencies in intelligence and security disciplines and conduct after capture; to contribute to effective and timely advice to the armed forces on appropriate intelligence and security matters; and to maintain an operation capability. The key performance targets are set for the agency for the 12 months from April 1997 are:

Key target 1:

To meet 100 per cent. of operational tasking to performance standards agreed with the Director General and Intelligence Geographic Resources—DGIGR—and to the satisfaction of "customers", in accordance with priorities laid down by, or through, Director Intelligence Commitments, and within agreed resources.

Key target 2:

To make available to "customers" 3,483 training days and, where possible, to meet surge requirements within agreed resources.

Key target 3:

To produce by 31 March 1998 a plan to introduce a systems approach to training to DISC courses from ! April 1998 onwards.

Key target 4:

(a) To complete the rationalisation and collocation of DISC in accordance with the timetable, subject to the satisfactory performance of contractors and other external staff.

(b) To deliver the required output as expressed in the "Aim, Objectives and Key Targets", within agreed resources.

Key target 5:

To achieve a 2.5 per cent. improvement in efficiency within the 1997–98 operating costs budget, in addition to the savings from collocation.

Military Survey Defence Agency

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Military Survey Defence Agency for 1997–98. [12209]

Mr. Spellar: The role of Military Survey Defence Agency is to ensure the provision of geographic support to defence operations, planning and training. The key targets set for the agency for the 12 months from April 1997 are:

Key target 1:

To satisfy 100 per cent. of requirements for operations on time from within the agency's capabilities and resources.

Key target 2:

To maintain the operational readiness of the field support elements of the agency to the Army standard known as "substantially effective".

Key target 3:

To achieve the agreed work programme on time, to cost and to deliver 457 discrete products.

Key target 4:

To meet milestones agreed by the operational sponsors for the Military Survey digital geographic information system.

Key target 5:

To meet agreed milestones in a wider Defence intelligence "Competing for Quality" project, embracing the agency's non-core IT, media and print support.

Key target 6:

To achieve a 2.5 per cent. improvement in efficiency above the 1996–97 baseline.

Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre

Mr. Alan Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre for 1997–98. [12216]

Mr. Spellar: The Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre exploits analyses and exploits imagery from all available sources and produces intelligence products and services to meet central MOD and operational command requirements. The targets set for the 12 months from April 1997 are:

Key target 1:

To respond to all operational tasks, which might involve the detachment of up to 22 service personnel. Tasks are to be met within agreed timescales as follows:

98 per cent. of priority 1 tasks

90 per cent. of priority 2 tasks

85 per cent. of priority 3 tasks

Key target 2:

Subject to achieving key target 1, the agency's programme of work, including standing intelligence requirements and support to contingency planning, will be met within agreed timescales as follows:

90 per cent. of priority 2 tasks

85 per cent. of priority 3 tasks

75 per cent. of priority 4 tasks

70 per cent. of priority 5 tasks

Key target 3:

In conjunction with the Defence Analytical Services Agency, to establish a baseline for measuring customer satisfaction by October 1997, and to improve the quality of customer service by March 1998.

Key target 4:

To achieve a 2.5 per cent. improvement in efficiency.

Key target 5:

To ensure the upgrade of JARIC's technical capabilities meets its planned operating capability by March 1998.

Key target 6:

To conduct trials and studies to support the procurement of reconnaissance systems in response to MOD agreed tasking, meeting time and quality requirements within agreed resources.

Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency for 1997–98. [12325]

Dr. Reid: The chief executive of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency has been set the following key targets for 1997–98:

1. To achieve 80 per cent. demand satisfaction on presentation.
2. To obtain the works brief so that laboratories and workshops can be collocated by September 1999.
3. To complete a review of the scope for further private sector involvement.

These key targets take forward the work of the previous year's targets in the context of the agency's continuing collocation and restructuring plans. Collocation of the agency will ensure the agency remains in a position to benefit from opportunities for further rationalisation and provide the scope to reform activities which are essential to the achievement of the agency's corporate and business plans. Given all the other pressures on the agency, particularly downward financial pressure, I believe they are challenging but achievable. I have previously arranged for copies of the agency's framework document to be placed in the Library of both Houses and the annual report and accounts for 1996–97 have also been so placed.

Defence Animal Centre

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Animal Centre for 1997–98. [12318]

Dr. Reid: The chief executive has been set the following key targets for 1997–1998:

1. Meet 100 per cent. of the requirements for trained military personnel and trained military working animals for operations;
2. Meet 95 per cent. of customer satisfaction for trained output quality;
3. Meet 95 per cent. of customer satisfaction in terms of trained output;
4. Meet 95 per cent. of customer satisfaction in timeliness of delivery;
5. To reduce net full costs as shown in the accruals accounts by 2.5 per cent.;
6. Meet course specific success rates for military working animals greater than or equal to 95 per cent.;
7. Meet training success rate for personnel greater than or equal to 90 per cent.;
8. To complete the planned stages of the investors in people action plan;
9. To explore all private finance initiative options for rebuilding administrative and single person accommodation.

RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency for 1997–98. [12324]

Mr. Spellar: The RAF Maintenance Group Defence Agency's key targets for 1997–98 are:

To achieve at least 98 per cent. of the aerosystems maintenance task to standard and on time.

To keep within the agency's allocated budget.

To achieve the efficiency targets specified in the logistics command management plan.

To complete the comprehensive rationalisation of functions within the agency by:

relocating the ground ratio servicing centre from RAF North Luffenham to RAF Sealand by 31 December 1997.

withdrawal from RAF North Luffenham by 31 March 1998.

To achieve the civilianisation programme at the RAF MGDA units.

To implement the delegation of specified civilian personnel management functions to RAF St. Athan, RAF Sealand and RAF Stafford by 31 March 1998.

To continue the certification of Units with the agency to the ISO9000 standard by:

achieving second or third party ISO9002 re-certification of the Royal Air Force armament support unit (RAFASUPU) by 1 November 1997.

achieving third party ISO9001 certification for RAF Stafford by 27 July 1997.

To develop and implement continual customer satisfaction measurement by 31 March 1998.

Defence Analytical Services Agency

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the review of the Defence Analytical Services Agency has commenced. [12458]

Dr. Reid: A periodic review of the Defence Analytical Services Agency is under way. As a defence agency, the performance of DASA since its launch will be evaluated and a review of the options for the best management of its functions will be undertaken.

Comments and contributions from those with an interest in DASA and its work will be welcomed and should be sent by 30 September 1997 to:

DASA Review Team
Project Manager
Room 119
Northumberland House
London
WC2N 5BP
Telephone: 0171 218 0339
Fax: 0171 218 5203.

Defence Bills Agency

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Bills Agency for 1997–98. [12459]

Mr. Spellar: Targets have been set for the chief executive of the Defence Bills Agency for financial year 1997–98 in accordance with the agency's overall aim of meeting the requirements of its service level agreement with the Ministry of Defence fully, efficiently and in a manner which offers best value for money. The chief executive's key targets build on the already high standards of service provided by the agency since its formation in January 1996 and are as follows:

1. To pay 97 per cent. of correctly-presented bills within 11 working days of receipt and 100 per cent. within 30 days.

2. To raise 100 per cent. of invoices within five working days of receipt of correctly-presented instruction.

3. To obtain investors in people accreditation by 30 September 1997.

4. To meet the performance criteria laid down in the service level agreement

5. To deliver the service contracted for in the service level agreement at the agreed price.

Wessex Helicopter Replacement

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the replacement of the service currently provided by the Wessex helicopters of No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron. [12473]

Mr. Spellar: The two Wessex aircraft used by No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron are nearly 30 years old and are becoming increasingly costly to maintain and operate. At the request of the royal household, we will therefore shortly issue invitations to tender to UK helicopter operators to provide a service based on a single helicopter. The cost of the new service will be met by the royal household from the royal travel grant in aid and should provide significant savings.

Future Large Aircraft

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current status of the future large aircraft programme. [9979]

Mr. George Robertson: The importance of an air transport capability in the new strategic environment has been demonstrated in numerous recent operations such as the Gulf conflict and Bosnia.

My Department has been closely involved in discussions with European partners on the future large aircraft programme, which is a potential solution to our future air transport requirements. I have now decided that the UK should join partners in issuing a request for proposals to Airbus Military Company for the future large aircraft, and formally endorse the European staff requirement and statement of principles governing the commercial management of the programme.

The programme offers an important opportunity for European industry. The Government believe, however, that there is a need to maintain competitive pressure to ensure best value for money. We shall, therefore, be encouraging our partners to join us in seeking bids from other aircraft manufacturers.

We expect the replacement aircraft to come into service early next century. Precise costs for each aircraft will be provided in response to our request for proposals.

Gordon Foxley

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about negotiations with the companies involved in the payment of commissions to Gordon Foxley relating to defence companies. [7090]

Mr. Spellar *[pursuant to his answer, 3 July 1997, c. 257]:* and following the announcement made by the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement on 13 June 1996, *Official Report,* column *248,* concerning settlement with Raufoss AS: A satisfactory settlement has now been concluded with the second of the three companies concerned, Junghans GmbH of Germany, under which the company will pay an agreed sum in redress to my Department, including interest and a contribution to costs for payments made contrary to contractual conditions. A statement of contribution by the company, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House, forms part of the agreement with the Ministry of Defence. We have decided that in the light of this agreement the company will become eligible to be considered for Ministry of Defence orders, although normal commercial relations will not be resumed for some months. Discussions are continuing with the successor companies to Fratelli Borletti SpA, the third company involved in the Foxley case, against whom proceedings are still in train.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what percentage of employees in his private office are *(a)* of Asian origin and *(b)* of Afro-Caribbean origin. [8964]

Mr. Spellar: Data on the ethnic origin of civilian staff are collected on a self declaration, confidential basis. Under my Department's code of practice on ethnicity data relating to civilian staff, we do not give information if numbers in statistical summaries are so small that it would be easy to identify the individuals concerned.

The number of staff in private office who have declared themselves as of Asian origin is fewer than five and is not therefore given. The number of staff who have declared themselves as of Afro-Caribbean origin is five which is 10 per cent. of the current total numbers of civilian and service staff.

Hawk Aircraft (Indonesia)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he undertook with *(a)* the Foreign Secretary and *(b)* the President of the Board of Trade before the decision was made to allow further sales of Hawk jets to Indonesia. [10366]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry on 11 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns 646–47.

Services Museums

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the services museums indicating the financial contribution to each from his Department in the latest year for which figures are available; [10753]

(2) what action he will take following the publication of the report "The Way Ahead" on services museums. [10751]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House. I shall also provide additional information on the funding and location of museums across all three services which, for completeness, should have been included in the Minister for the Armed Forces' answers to him of 29 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *178–79*.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10739]

Mr. Spellar: Employees on the payroll of the Ministry of Defence are either civil servants or members of the armed forces.

Civil Service

For civil servants the Pay and Personnel Agency carries out the following functions related to the department's payroll responsibilities. The associated management systems and costs are also shown.

Function	*Management systems*	*Costs of the systems/processes in 1996–97 £ million*
Civil Service non-industrial pay	On-line validation and error reporting—known as "OLIVER"	5.59
Civil Service industrial pay	The Defence Industrial Pay Systems (DIPS)	5.82
Pensions administration	Financial Information System—known as "FIS"	2.97
Expenses management and processing	Computerised payment and authorising of civilian travel—"COMPACT"	1.54
Personnel IT support	Civilian Personnel Management Information System—CIPMIS	0.62

There are no co-operative arrangements with other Departments although the agency does provide some payroll associated services to other Government Departments and agencies on a recoverable costs basis.

There is no sub-contractor involvement with the systems and processes associated with civilian payroll as the bulk are bespoke systems designed, maintained and operated in-house. However, the management system use for pensions administration is provided by Chessington Computer Services Ltd., which is contracted by the Cabinet Office under the central arrangements for the principal civil service pension scheme. Similarly the agency maintains a civilian staff personnel information system as a complementary service to the MOD and this uses a contractor—CAP Gemini—to provide IT operations and support.

Armed Forces

For members of the armed forces, the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency—AFPAA—formed on 1 April 1997, is responsible for the following tri-service payroll functions:

Payment of regular, reserve and volunteer reserve military personnel including associated allowances.

Payment of terminal grants, special capital payments and resettlement commutation.

Payment of family maintenance grants.

Pensions administration.

A number of mostly bespoke management systems provide the listed functions but a separate, commercial, package has been purchased to administer RAF reserves pay.

There are no co-operative arrangements with other Government Departments for armed forces payroll. However, normal administrative arrangements exist with external organisations such as DSS, CSA, HMIT and the Inland Revenue.

Sub-contractors who are employed by—AFPAA—and provide support to payroll systems are; QVF, Grist, CSS Trident, Lorien and Parity Solutions Ltd.

As military personnel administration and payroll functions utilise the same IT infrastructure and systems, it is not possible to identify separately those costs specifically attributable to payroll. However, indicative costs for providing payroll and pensions services to the armed forces are;

Navy £10.13 million

Army £11.69 million

RAF £9.81 million

AFPAA is currently engaged in the procurement of a partner from the private sector, through the private finance initiative, to deliver most of the agency's services. The contractor will be required to deliver a harmonised tri-service pay system by 1 April 2000."

HMS Tiger

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what type of Royal Navy vessels have carried the designation HMS Tiger; and what was the role of each vessel. [11959]

Mr. Spellar: There have been 12 ships of war built since the 15th century that have borne the name "Tiger".

Type	*Built/commissioned*
22 Gun ship	1546
Discovery vessel	1613
32 Gun ship	1647
48 Gun ship	1678
50 Gun ship	1743
60 Gun ship	1747
4 Gun ship	1794
12 Gun ship	1805
Sloop	1849
Destroyer	1900
Battlecruiser	1913
Cruiser	1942

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste within his Department; [11560]

(2) what plans he has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for his Department; [11559]

(3) if he will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by his Department in each of the last five years. [11561]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the nuclear accident response organisation was set up; and how many units within his Department report to it. [11828]

Mr. Spellar: A nuclear accident response capability has been in existence since the 1950s, when my Department began to use nuclear material. This capability has been developed over time into what is now known as the MOD Nuclear Accident Response Organisation. This organisation would draw on skills from a range of units across the armed forces and the MOD.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department plans to hold the next exercise to test procedures for dealing with accidents involving nuclear weapons on British territory; where this exercise will be held; and what is the title of this exercise. [11947]

Mr. Spellar: The next exercise—Exercise Senator 97—to test procedures in the event of an accident involving nuclear weapons on British territory, will be held between 22 and 26 September 1997 in conjunction with the authorities in Lincolnshire. Details of the exercise will be sent in the normal way to the hon. Members in whose constituencies the exercise will occur.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make public reports of exercises held to test his Department's procedures for dealing with an accident involving nuclear weapons on British territory. [11946]

Mr. Spellar: The reports of exercises held to test the Department's procedures for dealing with an accident involving nuclear weapons are classified or management in confidence documents. Making these reports public could affect the candour with which participants comment on experience and undermine the value of the exercises. We are considering, in consultation with all participating agencies, whether a summary of exercise activities should be publicly available on request.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the members of the nuclear weapons safety committee, indicating the Government Departments and organisations they represent. [11948]

Mr. Spellar: The members of the nuclear weapon safety committee are as follows:

Professor Sir John Cadogan CBE FRSE HON FEng FRS (Chairman)

Professor R.J. Berry RD FRCP FRCR FFOM

Professor R.H. Clarke

Mr. H.J. Dunster CB

Dr. B. Edmondson

Dr. B.L. Eyre CBE FEng

Mr. D.C. Fakley OBE

Professor J. E. Field OBE FRS

Rear Admiral J. S. Grove CB OBE RN Retired

Sir John Hill FEng FRS

Mr. P.G.E.F. Jones CB

Dr. F.H. Panton CBE

Members are invited to serve on the committee in their own right as acknowledged experts in the nuclear field. As such, they do not represent any particular organisations or Government Departments. They are assisted by officials from my Department who also attend meetings as and when necessary.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidelines for service personnel he has drawn up on how to fight fires involving nuclear weapons; when the latest version of these were issued; and how many versions have been issued since 1967. [11958]

Mr. Spellar: Instructions to service personnel on fighting fires involving nuclear weapons are contained in various service publications, which are updated as necessary. The key principles in these instructions are the same as the guidelines issued to civilian fire service personnel in the "local authority and emergency service information on nuclear weapon transport contingency plans"—the LAESI document a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many exercises have been held since January 1996 to test his Department's procedures for dealing with an accident involving nuclear weapons on British territory; what were the names of these exercises; and where and when they were held. [11884]

Mr. Spellar: The following medium and major nuclear weapon accident exercises have been held since January 1996:

Nuclear weapon accident exercises since January 1996

Date	*Name*	*Location*
February 1996	Running Fox	Hampshire
April 1996	[1]Standardisation	Wiltshire
May 1996	Senator 96	Northumberland
June 1996	Running Fox	Hampshire
September 1996	Bowline	Argyll and Bute
October 1996	[1]Standardisation	Oxfordshire
October 1996	[1]Standardisation	Suffolk
November 1996	[1]Standardisation	South Glamorgan
March 1997	[1]Standardisation	Norfolk
April 1997	[1]Standardisation	Wiltshire
June 1997	[1]Standardisation	West Yorkshire

[1] Standardisation exercises test the RAF immediate response force teams for the transportation of nuclear weapons.

Information regarding minor exercises, organised at unit level is not held centrally.

Meteorological Experiments

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will open for public inspection at the Public Record Office the file with the classmark AIR 2/17902 relating to meteorological experiments. [11956]

Mr. Spellar: In line with our commitment to greater openness, arrangements are being made to review AIR 2/17902 ahead of its scheduled review date. Companion files, AIR 2/17903 and 17904, will also be examined at the same time. I will write to the hon. Member on completion of the review process and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

10 Squadron (Cargo)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the nature of the material which was transported from RAF Brize Norton to Dover Air Force base in the United States of America by 10 Squadron on *(a)* 10 February, *(b)* 12 May and *(c)* 16 May; from which establishment this material originated; what was the ultimate destination of the material; and under which defence agreement this material was transferred. [11957]

Mr. Spellar: I am withholding the information requested under exemption 1 of the code of practice on access to Government information relating to defence, security and international relations.

Office Refurbishment

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the refurbishment of ministerial offices in his Department; and what is the estimated cost of the works and date of completion. [11871]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Air Force Bases (Germany)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Royal Air Force began operating from its bases at Laarbruch and Bruggen in Germany; and what use is currently made of the bases by the Royal Air Force. [11857]

Mr. Spellar: RAF Laarbruch commenced operations in November 1954. Currently, the station is the main operating base for Numbers 3 and 4 squadrons, equipped with Harrier GR7 aircraft, and Numbers 1 (Field) and 26 (Rapier) squadrons, RAF regiment. RAF Bruggen commenced operations in July 1953. Currently, the station is the main operating base for Numbers 9, 14, 17 and 31 squadrons, equipped with Tornado GR1 aircraft, and Number 37 squadron RAF regiment.

RAF Menwith Hill

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department received a copy of the report carried out by a United States department inspector general into breaches of security at RAF Menwith Hill in 1993. [11853]

Mr. Spellar: The inspector general's office is an auditing body with no locus in security matters. However, there is a regular dialogue between my Department and the US authorities concerning security at RAF Menwith Hill and I am aware that an internal US review was carried out in 1993.

Military Assistance

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the review of the practice of withholding details of military assistance to other countries is expected to be completed. [11964]

Mr. Spellar: Work on the review is continuing. I expect to make an announcement to the House soon after Parliament returns in the autumn.

WE-177 Bomb

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the WE-177 bomb is expected to be withdrawn from service; and which types of WE-177 have been in service and on what dates. [11954]

Mr. Spellar: The WE-177 type B bomb entered service on 1966. The type A and type C variants entered service in 1969 and 1973 respectively. The last of these weapons will be withdrawn, as previously announced, on 31 March 1998.

AWE Aldermaston Newsletter

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how often the newsletter at the atomic weapons establishment, Aldermaston is produced; when the newsletter was first produced; and what is the current security classification. [11965]

Mr. Spellar: An internal newsletter has been produced at the atomic weapons establishment since November 1953. It is issued six times a year and is unclassified. A recent additional innovation is an occasional magazine, "AWE Community Link", which is distributed to some 10,000 households in the locality.

Defence Employment

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the figures for military personnel employed in 1996 by local authority area. [11576]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Defence Analytical Services Agency and I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Sir George Young, dated 31 July 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence requesting publication of "figures for military personnel employed in 1996 by local authority area" since this falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Defence Analytical Services Agency.

This information is published annually by Defence Analytical Services Agency in our tri-service personnel series under the title "UK Regular Forces" strengths in the United Kingdom by local authority area.

The latest version covers the deployment of Armed Forces as at 1 July 1996. Copies of this return are available from the House of Commons library.

I hope you find the information useful.

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for each region the number of employees in defence industries for the financial year 1995–96. [11579]

Mr. Spellar: The information requested is not available precisely in the form requested. However, table 1.12 of the 1997 edition of "UK Defence Statistics", published on 29 July, gives the provisional estimated UK regional employment directly dependent on defence equipment expenditure, that is to say those working directly for defence contractors. A copy of "UK Defence Statistics 1997" has been placed in the Library of the House.

British Prisoners of War (Salary Payments)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy in respect of the payment of salaries to British officers held as prisoners of war in future conflicts. [11723]

Mr. Spellar: British officers who are taken prisoner of war in any future conflict will continue to receive their pay unless the Defence Council or an officer authorised by them is satisfied:

(a) that they were made prisoners through their own disobedience to orders or wilful neglect of duty;

(b) that having been made prisoners they failed to take any reasonable steps available to them to rejoin Her Majesty's service;

(c) that having been made prisoners they served with, or aided, the enemy in the prosecution of hostilities or measures calculated to influence morale or in any other manner whatsoever not authorised by international usage.

(d) That they were in receipt of pay advanced by the detaining power.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy towards the payment of salary to officers from the armed forces who were held as prisoners of war during the Gulf conflict. [11722]

Mr. Spellar: British officers who were taken prisoner during the Gulf conflict continued to receive their pay for the few weeks they were held captive.

Land Mines

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 25 July, *Official Report*, column *785*, on land mines, when his officials first learnt that all British anti-personnel land mines had not been taken up following conflicts in the Falkland Islands and the Gulf. [11611]

Mr. Spellar: Officials in my Department have been aware since the clearance of British minefields in the Falkland Islands in August 1986 that one British anti-personnel land mine could not be located.

The officials responsible for providing my right hon. Friend with advice on this subject were informed on 10 July 1997 by those responsible for laying the anti-personnel land mines in Iraq that not all have been recovered.

Officers

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving officers hold the ranks of *(a)* field marshal, *(b)* general, *(c)* lieutenant general and *(d)* major general or their equivalents in the (i) Army, (ii) Royal Air Force, (iii) Navy and (iv) Royal Marines; how many and what percentage of each category attended fee-paying private schools; what steps are being taken to ensure that future officer intakes reflect the educational provision of the UK; and if he will make a statement. [12006]

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of his letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what funding is presently committed from his departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [11900]

Mr. Spellar: In accordance with guidelines issued by the Cabinet Office and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency Year 2000 Public Sector Group, my Department is examining its computer systems to determine their susceptibility, if any, to the year 2000 problem and to produce plans for the necessary modifications. The estimated costs of these modifications will not be available until later this year. My Department has also stressed the importance of this issue to industry. For all new procurements, the Department is insisting year 2000 compliance as a condition of contract.

Document AIR 2/16918

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons his Department withdrew AIR 2/16918 from the Public Record Office; which offices within his Department consulted the document; on what date the document was received from and returned to the Public Record Office; and if he will make a statement. [12239]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment of the medical effects of the CS gas solvent, methyl isobutyl ketone has been made by officials of his Department since 1990; how many published or internal reports have been written on this subject by his Department's medical officers since 1990; and how many of these reports are currently unclassified. [12176]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Abbeywood

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in respect of Abbeywood *(a)* the number of part-time and full-time employees, *(b)* the totals of (i) wages and salaries, (ii) national insurance and (iii) pensions in respect of each category, *(c)* the totals of (1) travel costs and (2) housing costs in respect of all employees at Abbeywood and *(d)* all expenditure on Abbeywood broken down by category in 1996–97; and what was the total of expenditure listed in (d) as a percentage of that year's total Ministry of Defence outturn. [11597]

Mr. Spellar: The major occupier of the Abbeywood site is the Procurement Executive with 3,999 full-time and 74 part-time employees. Sharing the site is the Ships Support Agency with 754 full-time and 12 part-time employees.

Costs related to the specific categories requested are not readily available and will require further investigation. I will write to the hon. Member with further information when it is available and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many of the biological detection system vehicles operated by the 1 field laboratory unit during the Gulf war *(a)* arrived at their destination with scientific equipment damaged and *(b)* were repaired to full operational capability by the end of the conflict; and if he will make a statement; [11879]

(2) in what form were samples collected by the Sandfly air sampling system on each of the nine vehicles of the 1 field laboratory unit in the Gulf war *(a)* recorded and *(b)* stored; and where those samples and records are currently kept. [11596]

Dr. Reid: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all papers prepared by Dr. Coker for his Department's Gulf war illness inquiries; and if he will place in the Library copies of all reports. [12018]

Mr. Spellar: Group Captain Coker published a paper on the results from the first 284 patients seen by the MoD's medical assessment programme—MAP—in the summer 1996 edition of the Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service—"A Review of Gulf War Illness".—I have arranged for a copy of this paper to be placed in the Library of the House.

In late 1996, the group captain prepared the first draft of a paper concerning the results from some 500 MAP patients. However, in the event work on this draft paper was never completed.

Doctors at the MAP have now seen 1,520 patients and the Government have undertaken to publish detailed results form the programme later this year. Group Captain Coker will be closely involved with this work, which will supersede his earlier draft paper.

Hadleigh

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons his Department has closed its site on the outskirts of Hadleigh in Suffolk; when this site was first opened by the Ministry of Defence; and what was its function. [12103]

Mr. Spellar: The reasons for closing ammunition compound Hadleigh were, as the site is in close proximity to residential development, the explosive licences issued were so restrictive and therefore the full range of ammunition required by units based in East Anglia could not be stored. The cost of running the site was high as the movement of ammunition in to and out of the storage buildings was manpower intensive, the design of the buildings precluded the use of mechanical handling equipment.

The site was first opened during world war two.

The function of the site was to store ammunition.

Nuclear Warheads

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of active nuclear warheads available to British forces for each year since 1975. [11797]

Mr. Spellar: I am withholding this information under exemption 1 of the code of practice on access to Government information relating to defence, security and international relations.

Hawk Jet Sales

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors underlie the continued sale of Hawk jets. [11831]

Mr. Spellar: Any application for a licence to export Hawks will be considered in accordance with the Government's policy on the export of conventional arms, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 28 July, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*.

American Submarines

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy in respect of the use of British waters by American submarines with nuclear capability. [11815]

Mr. Spellar: United States Navy nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed submarines may visit UK waters or designated berths subject to prior agreement with my Department. However, as with all vessels, they have a right of innocent passage through territorial waters.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the President of the Council if she will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which her Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10746]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The collation and processing of payments to my Department's staff are carried out within the Privy Council Office; the staff costs associated with this work are estimated at £1,900 in the year 1996–97. The actual payments are made by Chessington Computer Services Ltd., which uses the SPIRE—standard payroll input and retrieval—management system; the cost of this contract in the year 1996–97 was £4,900.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Environmental Audit Committee

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Council if she will ensure that the reports of the proposed environmental audit committee are debated on the Floor of the House. [10674]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I cannot give any undertakings, but I hope that it will be possible to find opportunities for the House to give appropriate consideration to the work of the committee.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Council if she will ensure that the proposed environmental audit committee is able to investigate and comment on legislation before it reaches Committee stage. [10675]

Mrs. Taylor: It will be for the committee to decide the subjects for its own inquiries.

The possibility of a Select Committee inquiry before the Second Reading of a Bill is discussed in the first report from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, which was published on Tuesday 29 July.

Scottish Business

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the President of the Council how much time has been spent by the House and its Committees considering Scottish issues in each of the past five years, indicating separately time spent on (i) Bills, (ii) questions and (iii) debates on *(a)* education, *(b)* housing, *(c)* transport, *(d)* social work, *(e)* employment and economic development and *(f)* other subjects. [10179]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The information is available in parliamentary Session, rather than calendar year. The hon. Member should note that Session 1992–93 was longer than usual, and 1996–97 shorter than usual, due to general elections.

Chamber

(i) Bills

1996–97: 21.09 (nine Bills, of which three consolidation Bills and one private Members' Bill).

1995–96: 13.15 (three Bills).

1994–95: 17.33 (six Bills, of which three consolidation Bills).

1993–94: 28.03 (two Bills, of which one private peer's Bill).

1992–93: 17.07 (seven Bills, of which two consolidation Bills and three private Member's Bills).

(ii) Questions

1996–97: 4.02 (four sessions).

1995–96: 8.59 (nine sessions).

1994–95: 7.55 (eight sessions).

1993–94: 7.19 (eight sessions)

1992–93: 11.02 (12 sessions)

(iii) Debates

1996–97: Two approval motions: one on local government finance (3.36) one on housing (1.42).

1995–96: Two approval motions: one on local government finance (1.34) one on housing (1.34) and a motion amending Standing Orders relating to the Scottish Grand Committee (1.31).

1994–95: One approval motion on local government finance and housing (3.12) and an opposition day debate on the environment (3.28).

1993–94: Four approval motions: one on housing (2.15) one on local government finance (4.23) one on commercial rates (1.34) one on legal aid (0.29) a motion setting up the Scottish Grand Committee (2.01) and a private Member's motion on Scottish Democracy (2.55).

1992–93: Seven approval motions: four on commercial rates (0.13, 0.13, 0.22, 1.56) one on local government finance (3.13) one on housing (1.40) one on legal aid (3.23) and two Opposition day debates: one on local government and water (3.18) one (initiated by the Scottish National Party) on the cold climate allowance (2.32).

COMMITTEES

Standing Committees

The following are extracts from the sessional returns for the relevant years detailing sittings of Standing Committees on Scottish issues.

	Number of sittings
1996–97	
First Scottish Standing Committee	
*Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill	11
*Contract (Scotland) Bill	1
*Scottish Legal Services Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill	1
*Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill	1
*Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Bill [*Lords*]	1
Scottish Grand Committee	
Ministerial statements	1

	Number of sittings
Bills	1
*Contract (Scotland) Bill	1
*Scottish Legal Services Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill	1
*Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill	1
*Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Bill	1
Subjects raised on a substantive motion for the Adjournment	
Scotland and defence	1
Local government in Scotland	1
Public expenditure in Scotland	1
Scotland in the World	1
Education and local government finance in Scotland	1
Housing and local government finance	1
1995–96	
First Scottish Standard Committee	
*Deer (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill [*Lords*]	1
*Education (Scotland) Bill [*Lords*]	7
Special Standing Committee	
*Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill	1
Scottish Grand Committee	
Ministerial Statements	1
Bills	
Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill	1
Subjects raised on a substantive motion for the Adjournment	
Law and Order in Scotland	1
Pre-School Education in Scotland	1
Economic Development of the Highlands and Islands	1
Effects of the Budget in Scotland	1
Local Government Funding in Scotland	1
The Health Service in Scotland	1
Employment and Training of Young People in Scotland also Deer (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill [*Lords*]	1
Child Benefit and Welfare Reform in Scotland	1
Privatisation in the National Health Service in Scotland	1
Criminal Justice in Scotland	1
Scotland in the Union	1
1994–95	
Special Standing Committee	
*Children (Scotland)	13
First Scottish Standing Committee	
*Criminal Justice (Scotland) [Lords]	9
Scottish Grand Committee—subjects raised on a substantive motion for the Adjournment	
Public Expenditure in Scotland	1
The Scottish Economy	1
The Future of Rail Services in Scotland	1
Scottish Homes	1
Inward Investment in Scotland	1
Council Tax in Scotland	1
Scotland's Local Government	
The Future of Nursery Education in Scotland	
The Structure of Water Services in Scotland	
The State of Housing in Scotland	1
The Financial and Economic Implications of Independence for Scotland	1
Community Care in Scotland	1
Competitiveness in the Scottish Economy	1
Bills	
*Children Government etc. (Scotland)	1
1993–94	
First Scottish Standing Committee	
Local Government etc. (Scotland)	40
Second Scottish Standing Committee	
Inshore Fishing (Scotland) [*Lords*]	1
State Hospitals (Scotland) [*Lords*]	1
Scottish Grand Committee	
Matters	
The Economy in Scotland	2
Law and Order in Scotland	1
Estimates	
Class XIV, Votes 17 and 18	1
Class XIV, Votes 13, 14, 7 and 8	2
Class XIV, Votes 1 and 2	1
1992–93	
First Scottish Standing Committee	
* Bankruptcy (Scotland)	10
* Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) [*Lords*]	8
Second Scottish Standing Committee	
Damages (Scotland) (No.2) [*Lords*]	1
Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland)	1
Protection of Animals (Scotland)	1
Carrying of Knives etc. (Scotland)	1
Scottish Grand Committee	
Bills	
*Bankruptcy (Scotland)	2
Matters	
Public Expenditure in Scotland	1
Local Government Reform in Scotland	1
National Health Service in Scotland	1
Crime in Scotland	1
Women's Issues in Scotland	1
Child Care in Scotland	1

In addition, Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation have considered instruments, etcetera relating to Scotland as follows:

1996–97: seven instruments at five sittings

1995–96: 13 instruments at nine sittings

1994–95: 18 instruments at 10 sittings

1993–94: 18 instruments at four sittings

1992–93: 56 instruments at 19 sittings

Scottish Affairs Select Committee

Further details are available from the Sessional Returns of the relevant year.

1996–97: 13 meetings, one visit, two reports and four minutes/memoranda of evidence and appendices

1995–96: 25 meetings, two visits, three reports and seven minutes/memoranda of evidence and appendices

1994–95: 19 meetings, six visits, three reports and four minutes/memoranda of Evidence and Appendices

1993–94: 26 meetings, six visits, one report and five minutes/memoranda of evidence and appendices

1992–93: 28 meetings, 15 visits, one report and four minutes/memoranda of evidence and appendices.

Public Accounts Commission

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission what discussions he has held with the Comptroller and Auditor General on the cost of inspecting the accounts of NHS trusts. [11846]

Mr. Sheldon: The Commission regularly discusses the costs of the National Audit Office's activities, most recently on 23 July 1997 when it considered the NAO's corporate plan for 1998–99 to 2002–03. The costs of inspecting the accounts of NHS trusts are included in the plan, but were not separately identified or discussed.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what plans he has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for his Department; [11547]

(2) if he will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by his Department in each of the last five years; [11549]

(3) if he will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste within his Department. [11548]

Mr. Fatchett: In 1996, in response to the White Paper "A Strategy for Sustainable Waste Management", we commissioned consultants to propose a waste minimisation strategy. Before then, there were no statistics available. Our consultants estimated that in 1996 this Department produced around 3,900 tons of solid waste per annum; 2,280 came from our London sites and 1,620 from our Hanslope Park site near Milton Keynes. Of the total, around 2,900 tons went ultimately to landfill. The balance, around 1,000 tons from the London sites, was incinerated by Westminster city council and the heat recovered for power generation.

Our current aim for central London by recycling, mainly paper, is to reduce by the year 2000 the amount of solid waste sent for landfill by 400 tons per annum, equivalent to a 33 per cent. reduction. Elements of this strategy were already in place in 1996 whereby white paper and toner cartridges were recycled.

At our Hanslope Park site, we are aiming for a reduction of 300 tons on the same time scale, representing a 20 per cent. reduction. At Hanslope Park, where we have a dispatch and packing operation, we introduced a recycling arrangement, whereby incoming cardboard packing material is shredded for reuse as an alternative to polystyrene products. We estimate that the financial savings from not dumping the cardboard as landfill, and not having to buy as much polystyrene packing materials, will meet the cost of the shredding equipment within 18 months. This is in addition to significantly reducing the amount of material sent to landfill.

The long-term aim of our waste minimisation strategy is to reduce by the year 2000 the proportion of waste going to landfill to 60 per cent. of the 1996 figure.

Rockall

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason he proposes to give up British claims to the area of the Atlantic around Rockall. [11779]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: British fishery limits to the west of Rockall will be redrawn upon the UK's accession to the United Nations convention on the law of the sea. The conversion will bring many advantages to the UK, including the right to impose strong anti-pollution measures around our shores and important freedom of navigation. The convention provides that rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf.

Even before accession, the UK's claim to 200-mile fishery limits based on Rockall was highly questionable. Rockall itself will remain part of Scotland with a 12-mile territorial sea, and will remain within British fishery limits, as will the Rockall Bank and the new deep water fisheries to the east of Rockall. Redrawing our fishery limits has no effect on our continental shelf to the west of Rockall.

Straddling Stocks

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the rules relating to straddling stocks under the UN law of the sea convention 1983; when they come into force; and if he will make a statement on the capacity of flag states to take action against foreign vessels taking straddling stocks. [11955]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The United Nations convention on the law of the sea—UNCLOS—of 10 December 1982, which enters into force for the United Kingdom on 24 August, contains a number of provisions relevant to straddling fish stocks, including a requirement that the states concerned seek to agree measures to conserve such stocks in the high seas. A detailed framework agreement of 1995 implementing these provisions of UNCLOS has been signed by the United Kingdom, but is not yet in force.

A costal state may pursue into the high seas foreign vessels fishing for straddling stocks within its fishery limits in breach of its law and regulations. The control of vessels fishing for straddling stocks on the high seas is primarily the responsibility of the flag state. A coastal state will also be able to take action to the extent provided in the 1995 straddling stocks agreement, once it enters into force.

Defence Exports

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the differences between the criteria set out in his answer to the hon. Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms) of 28 July, *Official Report*, columns *26–29* and the criteria followed by the previous Government. [11885]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The new criteria for considering licence applications for the export of conventional arms build on the UK's commitments to guidelines on arms transfers agreed with permanent members of the UN Security Council, the European Union and the then Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

The new criteria are more detailed and precise than those followed by the previous Government. They represent a clear tightening of policy on arms exports, inter alia, by:

moving from an assessment of whether equipment is likely to be used for internal repression of international aggression to an assessment of whether equipment might be so used;

requiring officials to consider clear evidence of recent use of similar equipment exported by any country;

providing detailed guidance on the meaning of internal repression;

giving guidance on those goods which have a more obvious potential for use in internal repression.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contracts permitted by the previous Government he intends to prohibit in accordance with the criteria set out in his answer to the hon. Member for East Ham of 28 July, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*. [11886]

Mr. Lloyd: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced on 28 July, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*, we were not responsible for the decisions on export licences made by the previous Administration. We do not, however, consider it realistic or practical to revoke licences which were valid and in force at the time of our election.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for East Ham of 28 July, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*, for what reasons Her Majesty's Government do not consider it would be realistic or practical to revoke arms exports licences which were valid and in force at the time of the general election. [12211]

Mr. Lloyd: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Sikander Mahmood

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the re-application for entry clearance by Sikander Mahmood, Islam Abad ref. IMM/D2436, will be dealt with *(a)* on the documentation submitted and *(b)* by interview. [11793]

Mr. Fatchett: We have asked our high commission in Islamabad for a detailed account of the application and my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will write to my hon. Friend within one week of receiving that account.

Indonesia

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what factors underlie the continued sale of Hawk jets to Indonesia. [11832]

Mr. Fatchett: The decision to authorise the issue of the current licences to export 16 Hawk Aircraft to Indonesia was announced to the House on 21 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *676*.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary told the House on 28 July, *Official Report*, columns *26–29*, the present Government were not responsible for the decisions on export licences made by the previous Administration. We do not, however, consider that it would be realistic or practical to revoke licences that were valid and in force at the time of our election.

East Timor

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many British made *(a)* Land Rovers, *(b)* water cannon and *(c)* other military, security and police equipment and vehicles are currently deployed in East Timor; and where they are located; [12105]

(2) what steps the British Government have taken to ascertain the amount of British-made military, security and police vehicles and equipment currently deployed by Indonesia in East Timor; and what mechanisms have been put in place to monitor the end use in East Timor of such vehicles and equipment; [12106]

(3) what assurances the Government have received from the Indonesian authorities regarding the deployment and use of British-made military, security and police equipment and vehicles in East Timor. [12104]

Mr. Fatchett: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding is presently committed from his departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [11892]

Mr. Fatchett: This Department's current cost estimate is £3 million—excluding the cost of replacement office automation systems, which will be millennium compliant, introduced before March 1999. We do not yet know the likely cost breakdown over the period in question. We will submit costed year 2000 plans to the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency by October 1997, in accordance with central requirements.

Congo

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what efforts his Department is making to monitor the human rights situation in eastern areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; [12091]

(2) what plans he has to refer the human rights record of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to *(a)* the UN Security Council and *(b)* the Organisation for African Unity; [12092]

(3) if he will make a statement on the human rights situation in eastern areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [12090]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I will write to my hon Friend shortly.

Burma

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking against the State Law and Order Restoration Committee regime in Burma; what plans he has to support sanctions against the regime; and if he will make a statement. [12225]

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to encourage the UN to investigate the conditions in the Karenni relocation camps in Burma and the activities there of SLORC forces. [12241]

Mr. Fatchett: I will write to my hon. Friends shortly.

Karabakh Conflict

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the new proposals of the three co-chairmen of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Minsk conference for a settlement of the Karabakh conflict; and if he will make a statement. [11984]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Cambodia

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with other European Union countries regarding recent events in Cambodia; and if he will make a statement; [12014]

(2) what reports he has received on the involvement of Cambodian Government officials in the drugs trade; and if he will make a statement; [12089]

(3) what representations he has made to the Government of Cambodia following the recent coup d'etat; and if he will make a statement; [12012]

(4) what consideration he has given to the withdrawal of Her Majesty's ambassador in Phnom Penh following the recent coup d'etat by the minority party in the coalition Government established after the supervised elections; and if he will make a statement. [12013]

Mr. Fatchett: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 26 June concerning a constituent; and why no acknowledgement has been sent to him. [11985]

Mr. Fatchett: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

British Embassy, Berlin

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to announce the preferred bidder for the private finance initiative contract for the British embassy in Berlin; and if he will make a statement. [12278]

Mr. Fatchett: The Department has selected Bebcon, a consortium of prominent German contractors and financiers, as the preferred bidder for the new British embassy offices in Berlin.

The embassy will be built to a design by Michael Wilford and Partners, winners of the 1995 embassy design competition, on the site of the pre-war British embassy in Wilhelmstrasse. Under the eventual contract, Bebcon will finance, construct and then manage the building for 30 years. Building work will start around the end of this year, and the embassy staff will move into the new building in autumn 1999.

This is the Department's pathfinder private finance initiative overseas estate project. European Union competition procedures and British Government private finance initiative guidance have been followed throughout.

European Council

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for August; and if he will list major EU events for the next six months. [12279]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The information is as follows:

This calendar is primarily concerned with European Union matters, but certain other relevant events are also included. Events and dates quoted are based on the information available on the date of issue.

European calendar: August 1997 to Janaury 1998

	Venue	*Event*
August 1997		
There are no events scheduled for August.		
September 1997		
4	Brussels	Political Committee
5	Kiev	EU/Ukraine Summit
7–9	Echternach	Agriculture Council (Informal)
12–14	Mondorf	Ecofin Council (Informal)
15–16	Brussels	General Affairs Council
15–19	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
22–25	New York	Political Committee
22–23	Brussels	Agriculture Council
29	Brussels	Political Committee (reserve date—to be confirmed)
October 1997		
1–2	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
2	Luxembourg	Telecommunications Council
3–4	Echternach	Internal Market Council (Informal)
6–7	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
7	Luxembourg	Social Affairs Council
9	Luxembourg	Transport Council
9–10	Mondorf	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Informal)
10–11	Strasbourg	Council of Europe Summit
13	Luxembourg	Econfin Council
16	Brussels	Political Committee
16	Luxembourg	Environment Council
16–17	Luxembourg	Possible European Council
20–21	Luxembourg	Political Committee
20–21	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
20–24	Strasbourg	European Parliamentary Plenary
24–27	Edinburgh	CHOGM
25–26	Mondorf	Foreign Ministers (Informal)
30	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
November 1997		
3	Brussels	Consumer Council
3	Brussels	Political Committee
5–6	Brussels	European Parliamentary Plenary
10	Brussels	Research Council
10	Brussels	General Affairs Council
13	Brussels	Industry Council
17	Brussels	Ecofin Council
17	Brussels	Political Committee
17–18	Brussels	Agricultural Council
17–21	Strasbourg	European Parliamentary Plenary
19	Brussels	Fisheries Council
20	Brussels	Education Council
21	Brussels	Budget Council
24	Brussels	Culture Council
24–25	Brussels	General Affairs Council
27	Brussels	Internal Market Council
28	Brussels	Development Council
December 1997		
1	Brussels	Ecofin Council
1	Brussels	Telecommunications Council
2	Brussels	Labour and Social Affairs
3–4	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
4	Brussels	Health Council
4–5	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
8	Brussels	Energy Council
8–9	Brussels	General Affairs Council
10–11	Brussels	Transport Council
12–13	Luxembourg	European Council
15–16	Brussels	Agriculture Council
15–16	Brussels	Environment Council

European calendar: August 1997 to Janaury 1998

	Venue	Event
15–19	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
18–19	Copenhagen	OSCE Ministerial Council
18–19	Brussels	Fisheries Council
January 1998		
1	—	UK Presidency commences
12	Brussels	Fisheries Council (to be confirmed)
19	Brussels	Ecofin Council
19–20	Brussels	Agriculture Council
26–27	Brussels	General Affairs Council
29–30	(to be advised)	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Informal)

Entry Clearance

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to lay before the House the 1996 report by Dame Elizabeth Anson, the independent monitor of refusal of entry clearance where there is no right of appeal. [12266]

Mr. Robin Cook: The report was laid today. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House. I welcome the report and note Dame Elizabeth's recommendations, which will receive careful consideration.

North Atlantic Assembly

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the United Kingdom delegation to the North Atlantic Assembly. [12280]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The following will represent the United Kingdom at the North Atlantic Assembly:

Mr. Donald Anderson MP (Leader)
Mr. Hugh Bayley MP
Mr. Menzies Campbell MP
Mr. Harry Cohen MP
Mr. Frank Cook MP
The right hon. Sir Peter Emery MP
Mr. Bruce George MP
The Lord Gladwyn of Clee
Mr. Mike Hancock MP
Mrs. Sylvia Heal MP
The right hon. Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith MP
The Lord Kennet
Alice Mahon MP
Mr. Michael Mates MP
Mr. John Smith MP
Rachel Squire MP
Mr. Peter Viggers MP
The right hon. Alan Williams MP

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10730]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: This Department is responsible for the assessment of staff pay, the preparation of input, the evaluation of output and the reconciliation of the pay account.

No management system has been purchased and there is no subcontractor involved.

The calculation of pay is carried out on our behalf by GCHQ Cheltenham.

The total cost of the in-house part of the whole operation is currently £1,160,000 per annum. This includes direct staff costs plus the cost of accommodation. The pay calculation running costs are borne by GCHQ, this Department having contributed to the original set-up costs.

Kenya

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications of the moral and ethical principles of his foreign policy for relations with Kenya. [11292]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave him on 2 June, *Official Report*, column *81*. We will treat respect for human rights as an important element in determining our overall relationship with Kenya. I underlined to the Kenyan Government and opposition the importance we attach to free and fair elections when I visited the country from 25 to 28 June. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development made clear on 16 July, *Official Report*, column *195*, we will take account of further developments in this respect in deciding on future development assistance to Kenya. We have condemned the recent violence in Kenya and continue to urge all concerned to agree through peaceful dialogue on how the necessary conditions for free and fair elections can be established.

Defence Equipment (Export Licences)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many export licences for defence equipment were issued between 1 May and 22 July. [10651]

Mrs. Roche: From 1 May up to and including 22 July 1997, 1,701 export licences were issued for the export of military, security and paramilitary goods and arms, ammunition and related material, controlled under part III of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994; 1,673 were standard individual export licences, and 28 were open individual export licences.

PRIME MINISTER

Policy Unit

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the commercial and other external interests of the members of his policy unit. [10399]

The Prime Minister: No. As with all other civil servants, the members of my policy unit are not required to publish their private interests. However they are required to ensure that there is no conflict between their private interests and their public duties.

"Questions of Procedure for Ministers"

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister how many revisions have been made to "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" since May 1992; what paragraphs were revised and in what way; what factors underlay each revision; and on what dates each revision was announced to Parliament. [10406]

The Prime Minister: Three amendments to "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" have been made since May 1992. The first revised paragraphs 118 to 123 and was announced to the House on 21 July 1994, *Official Report*, column 551. The second, which revised paragraph 1 was amended after debate on the then Government's response to the first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life Cm2931 and announced on 2 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *456*. The most recent amendment was again to paragraph 1 and was set out in the then Government's response to the second report from the Public Service Committee on ministerial accountability and responsibility, HC 67, published 5 November 1996, the publication of which was announced to the House on 7 November 1996 *Official Report*, column 594. The background to the changes was set out in the statements to the House at the time and, in the case of the latter change, the Government response to the Public Service Select Committee report.

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Prime Minister whether he has issued a new edition of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" to his ministerial colleagues. [12268]

The Prime Minister: I have issued to ministerial colleagues a successor document to "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" called the "Ministerial Code—a Code of Conduct and Guidance on Procedures for Ministers". I expect all Ministers to work within the letter and spirit of this code, in order to uphold the highest standards of honesty and propriety which the British people fairly expect of those in public life. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

I have also issued to my ministerial colleagues, "Guidance on the work of the Government Information Service"—a document which brings together in one place the guidance on the entire range of the Government information service's work. Copies of this have also been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Arms Sales

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those Departments with responsibility for arms sales indicating the particular responsibilities in each case. [10518]

The Prime Minister: The Departments most involved in matters related to defence exports are the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and HM Customs and Excise. The Defence Export Services Organisation, in the MOD, provides British defence exporters with the strongest possible Government support, within the framework of our defence, security and foreign policies. Licences to export controlled goods are issued by the President of the Board of Trade. All relevant individual licence applications are circulated by DTI to other Government Departments with an interest. These will normally include the FCO, MOD and Department for International Development. The DTI is also the sponsoring Department for the defence industry itself. It works closely with industry on the whole range of issues relating to its effectiveness. The FCO plays an active role in promoting British industry overseas and advises on the foreign policy implications of defence exports. Finally, HM Customs and Excise are responsible for the enforcement of export controls.

Sovereign (Documents)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will reduce the 100-year embargo on the release of documents relating to the sovereign and the sovereign's family. [10613]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* There is currently no statutory embargo on the release of public records relating to the royal family. The forthcoming White Paper on freedom of information will address the issue of public access to all types of Government records.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10734]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, *Official Report*, 29 July 1997, columns *140–41*.

Open Government

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 14 July, *Official Report*, column *44*, if he will consider opening the other papers in the classmark CAB171 at the Public Record Office. [10954]

The Prime Minister: I shall consider this and let the hon. Member know the outcome once all the material has been reviewed.

Palestine

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on UK-Palestine relations following his recent discussions with Chairman Arafat of the Palestine National Authority. [11338]

The Prime Minister: I was pleased to welcome President Arafat to London and to reiterate the Government's support for his work in the cause of peace in the middle east.

I made clear our concern at the continuing deadlock and our strong support for international efforts to get the peace process back on track. We believe that it is important that neither side acts in a way that damages the prospects for peace. I reaffirmed to President Arafat our view that the continued building of Israeli settlements is not only illegal under international law, but a major obstacle in the way of peace.

I urged President Arafat to do everything possible to contain violence and to ensure the Palestinian Authority's respect for human rights. I reaffirmed Britain's willingness to continue playing an active role in the search for a just and lasting peace based on the two key principles of land for peace and the right of Israel to live in peace within secure and recognised boundaries. As we approach our presidency of the European Union, we shall be giving particular attention to ways in which Europe can contribute.

I also reassured President Arafat of the United Kingdom's continuing strong material support for the Palestinians.

Scottish Parliament

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the security of funding for *(a)* accommodation and *(b)* services for the Scottish Assembly over the next (i) 10 and (ii) 20 years. [9927]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* The Government's proposals for the funding of the Scottish Parliament are set out in the White Paper, "Scotland's Parliament", which was published on 24 July.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact of the division of responsibility between *(a)* a Scottish Assembly and *(b)* the Westminster Parliament on the capacity of (i) the Privy Council and (ii) other courts to evolve a corpus of consistent rulings in the legislative competence of the Assembly. [11732]

The Prime Minister: The proposed procedures for identifying and resolving problems over the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament are set out in the White Paper, "Scotland's Parliament" at paragraphs 4.15 and 4.17. The Government believe that problems would normally be resolved amicably, but there would be procedures for establishing the competence of the Scottish Parliament both before and after legislation is considered by it; and there would be provision for unresolved disputes about vires to be referred to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. There is no reason why the courts should not evolve a consistent body of rulings.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the areas of Scots law which would be subject to the Scottish Parliament and not subject to Westminster. [11802]

The Prime Minister: The White Paper, "Scotland's Parliament" makes clear that all matters that are not specifically reserved would be devolved and would therefore fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament. A list of such matters is included in chapter 2 of the White Paper. Chapter 3 summarises the matters which would be observed.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if future United Kingdom legislation will include United Kingdom extent provisions following the introduction of a Scottish Parliament. [11801]

The Prime Minister: Following the introduction of a Scottish Parliament, United Kingdom legislation would continue where appropriate to include clauses defining its territorial extent.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact of a Scottish Parliament on the current judicial structure. [11803]

The Prime Minister: It is made clear in the White Paper "Scotland's Parliament" that responsibility for the criminal justice system and prosecution system for the civil and criminal courts in Scotland would be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. It would be a matter for the Scottish Parliament to determine how it discharges that responsibility, although I would expect it to pay full regard to the independence and standing of the judiciary. The two most senior judicial appointments in Scotland—The Lord President of the Court of Session and the Lord Justice Clerk—would however continue to be made by the Queen, on my advice, but on the basis of nominations from the Scottish Executive.

Amsterdam Summit

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) of 26 June, *Official Report,* column *608,* if he will make a statement on the obligations of member states not participating in the Euro-area as set out in the presidency conclusions at Amsterdam. [11423]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* As I said in my previous reply, membership of the new exchange rate mechanism will be voluntary. There is therefore no legal obligation to join.

Policy Reviews

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what recent instructions and guidelines he has given to Departments in relation to future policy reviews; and if he will make a statement. [11888]

The Prime Minister: Proposals for reviews should be cleared through my office, to ensure that they are considered in the context of the Government's overall agenda.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what is the Government's policy towards age discrimination in elections to public bodies. [11713]

The Prime Minister: Appointments to public bodies are governed by the overriding principle of selection based on merit. The Commissioner for Public Appointments' "Guidance on Appointment's to Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies and NHS bodies", which is mandatory for all Government Departments, states that age should not be a criterion in drawing up a specification for a public appointment unless there is a need to balance the age range of membership. However, even then, age should not be used as the deciding factor when making appointments.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on age discrimination in employment; and if he will make a statement. [11792]

Mr. Alan Willians: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy in relation to age discrimination; and what steps have been taken to implement the policy. [11806]

The Prime Minister: The Government firmly believe that age discrimination is unfair and makes no economic sense for business or society. However, tackling it is a complex matter and it is important to ensure that any action we take will bring real benefits. That is why we have already announced our intention to consult widely on age discrimination in employment to obtain a consensus on the best way forward.

Minister without Portfolio

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister for what reason the Government were represented at meetings in France on Thursday 17 July with *(a)* the French President's aide-de-camp and *(b)* the French Minister in charge of European affairs by the Minister without Portfolio. [11812]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by my hon. Friend the Minister without Portfolio.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster of 22 July, *Official Report*, column *525*, if he will include the answering practices of the Minister without Portfolio in the review of ministerial accountability. [11976]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the reply given by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 22 July, *Official Report*, column *525*.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the persons who were not established civil servants on 2 May whose salaries are currently being paid by Government Departments, identifying those who previously assisted the campaigning activity of the Labour party under the present Minister without Portfolio; and if he will list the current salaries and positions held by each of these persons. [5421]

The Prime Minister *[pursuant to his reply, 18 July, c. 340–41]:* Mr. Bernard Gray should be added to the list of special advisers.

Council of Europe

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Prime Minister if he will announce the composition of the United Kingdom delegation for the September 1997 part session of the parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. [12281]

The Prime Minister: The September 1997 part-session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will be opened in Strasbourg on 22 September. The delegation from the United Kingdom for the session will consist of 23 members of the Labour party, nine of the Conservative party and four members from the minority parties. The delegation will serve in place of the current delegation from the opening of September 1997 part-session.

The appointments of representatives and substitutes have been made on the basis of nominations by the parties concerned, in accordance with the resolution of this House on 22 May 1992, *Official Report*, column *682* and of the House of Lords on 18 June 1992, columns *290–92*.

The same delegation will be representing the United Kingdom Parliament at the Assembly of the Western European Union.

Representatives from the Government benches will be:

The hon. Member for Birmingham Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), who will act as leader; the hon. Members for Tooting (Mr. Cox); for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe); for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn); for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe); for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara); for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall); for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara); for Glasgow Baillieston (Mr. Wray); Lord Kirkhill and Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede.

Representatives from the Conservative Party will be:

The hon. Members for: Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson); for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman); for East Yorkshire (Mr. Townend) and Lord Newall.

Representatives from the minority parties will be:

The right. hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) and Lord Russell-Johnston.

The following substitutes have been appointed to act as necessary on behalf of the delegates.

From the Government Benches: the hon. Members for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer); for Wolverhampton, South-West (Ms Jones); for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Naysmith); for Dover (Mr. Prosser); for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley); for Basildon (Angela Smith); for Morecombe and Lunesdale (Miss Smith); for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Taylor); for Finchley and Golders Green; (Mr. Vis); Lord Grenfell and Lord Judd.

From the Conservative party—the hon. Members for Romsey (Mr. Colvin); for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles); for Solihull (Mr. Taylor); for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) and the Earl of Dundee.

From the minority parties—the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and the Lord Steel of Aikwood.

Written Questions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Prime Minister what has been the total cost of answering written questions tabled by the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker). [12536]

The Prime Minister: I am advised by POLIS that the hon. Member has tabled some 295 questions. The total cost is estimated at £30,000 since the beginning of May.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Higher Education

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will estimate, in 1995–96 prices, the level of Government expenditure on higher education for *(a)* 1990–91, *(b)* 1991–92, *(c)* 1992–93, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96, *(g)* 1996–97, *(h)* 1997–98, *(i)* 1998–99, *(j)* 1999–2000 and *(k)* 2000–01, using (i) the plans as set out in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98" including the estimates of the gross domestic product deflators contained therein, and (ii) the new estimates of the GDP deflator announced in the Budget and any additional moneys available as a consequence of the policy changes announced in his statement of 23 July; [11590]

(2) what is his estimate of the extra Government expenditure available for higher education as a consequence of his statement of 23 July for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000—01; and if he will make a statement. [11591]

Dr. Howells: The table shows the level of Government expenditure on higher education institutions for the period from 1990–91 to 1999–2000, in line with the expenditure plans announced in the 1996 Budget which were not changed in the July 1997 Budget. No figures are available for 2000–2001 at this stage.

In his statement of 23 July on the Government's preferred approach to the future funding of higher education, my right hon. Friend said savings would be used to improve quality, standards and opportunity for all in further and higher education. I refer the hon. Member to the following answer which sets out our estimates of the net savings associated with this preferred approach. Net savings would start to accrue in 1999–2000. We have not yet taken decisions about extra Government expenditure for higher education in the light of these savings.

Public Funding for Higher Education in England

Financial year	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*
November 1996 GDP deflator	7.99%	6.41%	4.21%	2.89%	1.77%	2.53%	2.50%	2.00%	2.00%	2.00%
June 1997 GDP deflator	8.00%	6.38%	4.20%	2.91%	1.51%	2.75%	2.76%	2.75%	2.75%	2.50%
HEFCE sector grants	£2,711m	£2,539m	£2,664m	£2,890m	£3,538m	£3,734m	£3,561m	£3,609m	£3,573m	£3,489m
TTA grants	—	—	—	—	—	£116m	£175m	£179m	£175m	£167m
Tuition fee income	£555m	£1,140m	£1,349m	£1,498m	£1,142m	£967m	£991m	£988m	£1,047m	£1,047m
Total funding in cash terms[1]	£3,266m	£3,679m	£4,013m	£4,388m	£4,680m	£4,817m	£4,727m	£4,776m	£4,796m	£4,703m
Total funding in real terms (November 1996 deflator)[2]	£3,986m	£4,219m	£4,416m	£4,693m	£4,918m	£4,937m	£4,727m	£4,682m	£4,609m	£4,432m
Total funding in real terms (June 1997 deflator)[3]	£3,993m	£4,228m	£4,426m	£4,703m	£4,941m	£4,950m	£4,727m	£4,648m	£4,542m	£4,346m

[1] Adjusted to allow for the dual support transfer to the Office of Science and Technology over the period 1992–93 to 1994–95.

[2] 1996–97 prices.

[3] 1996–97 prices.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his estimate on the present accounting basis, of the *(a)* additional expenditure on higher education and *(b)* additional revenues accruing to the Exchequer in (1) 1998–99, (2) 1999–2000 and (3) 2000–01, as a consequence of the proposed changes to higher education tuition payments and student maintenance; and if he will make a statement. [11188]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The following table shows the estimated cost of extending loans and the savings associated with the replacement of grants with loans and the introduction of tuition fees under the Government's preferred approach to the future funding of higher education announced by my right hon. Friend on 23 July. Figures are for financial years at 1995–96 prices. The net savings are therefore notional and have been derived independently of current expenditure plans. They are also dependent on the phasing of the introduction of the new loans arrangements.

£ million

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Additional loans expenditure[1]	(400)	(750)	(1,100)
Grants savings	250	600	850
Tuition fee savings	150	250	400
Net savings	0	100	150

[1] Costs are shown in brackets.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his estimate of student numbers in higher education for *(a)* 1990–91, *(b)* 1991–92, *(c)* 1992–93, *(d)* 1993–94, *(e)* 1994–95, *(f)* 1995–96, *(g)* 1996–97, *(h)* 1997–1998, *(i)* 1998–99, *(j)* 1999–2000 and *(k)* 2000–01. [11622]

Dr. Howells: The Government's estimates of higher education student numbers in England remain for the time being as shown in the table. No projections have yet been made for the year 2000–01.

Home and EU students (full-time equivalents, thousands) by academic year:

	Number
1990–91 actual	673
1991–92 actual	756
1992–93 actual	853
1993–94 actual	942
1994–95 actual	1,000
1995–96 provisional	1,041
1996–97 projected	1,046
1997–98 projected	1,042
1998–99 projected	1,058
1999–2000 projected	1,060

We shall review student numbers for future years in the light of our comprehensive spending review and of the recently published report of the national committee of inquiry into higher education under Sir Ron Dearing, whose aim of widening participation we support.

School Inspections

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to review the system of school inspections to ensure that schools that have received a satisfactory Office for Standards in Education report are not subject to a further inspection after an amalgamation; and if he will make a statement. [11082]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* The timing of school inspections and the requested analysis of inspections undertaken so far are matters for Her Majesty's chief inspector. I have asked him to write to my hon. Friend, placing a copy of his letter in the Library.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were the numbers of *(a)* Ofsted reports published up to 1 January 1997 for primary and secondary schools in England, *(b)* teaching staff in those schools and *(c)* teachers identified by the reports as poor or failing; and if he will make a statement. [11093]

Mr. Byers: The timing of school inspections and the requested analysis of inspections undertaken so far are matters for HMCI. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member, placing a copy of his letter in the Library.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will estimate the costs of the preparation and evaluation of inspection bids by *(a)* local education authorities, *(b)* private companies and *(c)* Ofsted, since the introduction of the compulsory competitive tendering regime. [5336]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 23 June 1997]:* The costs of the preparation and evaluation of inspection bids are matters for HMCI. I understand that he has written to my hon. Friend and a copy of his letter is being placed in the Library.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals he has to end compulsory competitive tendering in school inspections. [5335]

Mr. Byers: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the reply in the Library.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment under what legislative authority the Government will be implementing its welfare-to-work programme. [11638]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Opportunities for work, education and training under our new deal for young people and long term unemployed adults will be provided pursuant to arrangements made by the Secretary of State under the Employment and Training Act 1973, as amended by the Employment Act 1988. The new deal will deliver high quality options for 18 to 24-year-olds who claim the jobseeker's allowance for six months or more. We intend to amend the Jobseekers Allowance Regulations 1996, subject to the approval of Parliament, to ensure that young people who are entitled to benefit from the new deal also have responsibility for participating in the programme, and that there is no additional option of continuing indefinitely on full benefit.

New Deal

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to incorporate foyers into the gateway framework of the new deal; and if he will make a statement. [11917]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Foyers, like other interested organisations, will be able to bid to deliver appropriate parts of the gateway against the national specification which will set out the detailed arrangements for the provision of these services.

We are consulting widely on the design of the new deal for young unemployed people and on the range of provision which should be available during the gateway to help young people to overcome particular disadvantages and problems. Foyers, like other interested organisations, are fully involved in those consultations.

Oxbridge Entrants

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to increase the percentage of students entering Oxford and Cambridge universities from state schools. [11716]

Dr. Howells: The universities of Oxford and Cambridge are, like all higher education institutions, responsible for their own admissions procedures and Ministers are prevented by law from intervening in such matters.

Business (Government Assistance Schemes)

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people in each of the last five years qualified for assistance on *(a)* the enterprise allowance scheme and *(b)* the business start-up scheme in each standard region and Great Britain as a whole; and what was the annual expenditure in each year. [12172]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The enterprise allowance scheme was replaced in 1991–92 by the business start-up scheme which, in turn, was absorbed within the single regeneration budget in 1994–95. The precise information requested is not available, but starts by Government office region are available for 1994–95 and are given in table 1 and total expenditure and number of starts in England for each year of the programme are given in table 2.

Table 1: Business start-up scheme: Starts by English region 1994–95

Region	*Starts*
South East	2,393
London	3,081
Eastern	1,925
South West	2,801
West Midlands	1,576
East Midlands	3,042
Yorkshire and The Humber	3,402
Merseyside	1,356
North West	3,058
North East	1,602

Table 2: Business start-up scheme: Starts and expenditure in England

Year	*Starts*	*Expenditure (£ million)*
1992–93	33,600	62.0
1993–94	34,700	82.0
1994–95	24,236	63.8

Class Sizes (Bolton)

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly), of 18 June, *Official Report*, column *193–4*, what factors underlie the maximum class size of 60 for the Bolton, South-East constituency. [12004]

Mr. Byers: The information derives from classes as taught during a single selected period on the census date in January. This can include some unusually large classes. Classes can include nursery as well as infant classes,

classes engaged in activities such as physical education, games, drama, music, singing, watching television or listening to a radio programme, and classes supported by one or more members of the non-teaching staff of the school. Class sizes can be affected by one or more of these factors.

The class of 60 pupils taught by one teacher in the Bolton, South-East constituency was a nursery class. The teacher was supported by four nursery assistants.

Education-related Projects

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to review the criteria for the funding of youth and community projects and other education-related projects for young people in respect of the eligibility of those in the 11 to 14 years age range. [12230]

Dr. Howells: None. The delivery and funding of the youth service are matters for decision by individual local education authorities out of the resources made available to them through the annual local government finance settlement.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funding is presently committed from his departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [11897]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson), on 10 July 1997 *Official Report*, column *573*.

Autistic Children

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance he has issued to local education authorities on the provision of special educational needs for autistic children following the recent court judgment requiring an authority to pay for an autistic child to attend the Higashi school in the USA. [11791]

Ms Estelle Morris: The High Court's decision related to an individual appeal, where particular circumstances applied. It would not be appropriate to issue general advice to local education authorities on the basis of that case.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when his Department's review of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will be completed; and when he plans to make an announcement on its result. [11498]

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 26 June, *Official Report*, column *635*.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what representations he has received from *(a)* the National Disability Council and *(b)* organisations representing disabled people concerning the implementation of the later rights of access under part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and if he will make a statement; [11496]

(2) if he will publish a timetable for the implementation of the later rights of access within part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [11497]

Mr. Howarth: The National Disability Council, disabled people and their organisations, individual businesses and their representatives and many others have responded to the consultation exercise carried out by the previous Government last year and have given their views on how quickly it would be sensible to implement the later rights of access under part III of the Disability Discrimination Act. A summary of responses to the consultation exercise will be published in due course. The Department is currently considering these matters in the context of our determination to deliver our manifesto commitment to establishing comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people. The Department will make an announcement as soon as possible. Whatever our eventual recommendation, the Department is committed to developing our proposals in consultation with all interested parties.

Class Sizes

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what penalties the Government will enforce against schools which educate five, six and seven-year-olds in classes of more than 30. [11640]

Mr. Byers: It is our pledge that, by the end of this Parliament, all pupils of five, six and seven years old will be in classes of 30 or less. We are consulting on the mechanics of implementing this pledge to reduce class sizes.

University Students

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on changes in the percentage of students entering university education in the last 18 years from social classes A, B, C and D. [11717]

Dr. Howells: The following table shows how the proportions of young people from different socio-economic groups entering full-time higher education have changed since 1991–92: comparable data are not readily available from earlier years.

Table 1: The Age Participation Index (API) for Great Britain by socio-economic group

Academic year	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
I—Professional (A)	55	71	73	78	79
II—Intermediate (B)	36	39	42	45	45
IIIn—Skilled non-manual (C_1)	22	27	29	31	31
IIIm—Skilled manual (C_2)	11	15	17	18	18

Table 1: The Age Participation Index (API) for Great Britain by socio-economic group

Academic year	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
IV—Partly skilled (D)	12	14	16	17	17
V—Unskilled (E)	6	9	11	11	12
Total	23	28	30	32	32
Groups I to III	26	31	33	35	36
Groups IV and V	11	13	14	15	16

The API is the number of home domiciled young (aged less than 21) initial entrants to full-time undergraduate courses in GB, expressed as a proportion of the average 18 to 19 year old GB population.

(A), (B), (C_1), (C_2), (D), (E)—institute of practitioners (IPA) equivalent definition of social class.

Participation among socio-economic groups D and E remains less than half that of socio-economic groups A to C, notwithstanding the recent expansion in higher education. The Government's proposals, as set out in my right hon. Friend's statement to the House on 23 July, will encourage access and ensure free education for the least well-off.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures will be taken to address student hardship among poorer students following the introduction of tuition fees; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of fees on the composition of the student intake and on the level of educational attainment. [11794]

Dr. Howells: Under the Government's preferred approach to the future funding of higher education announced by my right hon. Friend on 23 July, students from poorer families will not have to pay fees. They will continue to receive free tuition. They will also have access to larger subsidised loans than students from better off families. The Government's proposals are designed to widen access to higher education and to encourage those from under-represented groups, such as lower-income families, to undertake higher education.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if European Union nationals studying in the United Kingdom will be required to pay fees for higher education on the same basis as United Kingdom nationals. [11626]

Dr. Howells: The Government remain committed to treating students from other European Union countries on the same basis as home students as far as fees are concerned.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the net annual savings to public funds from the introduction of tuition fees for higher education in each of the next 10 years. [11174]

Dr. Howells: The annual level of savings will be dependent upon the number of students entering higher education in each year, but for working purposes the savings associated with the introduction of tuition fees are estimated at approximately £150 million in the financial year 1998–99, rising to approximately £400 million in 2000–01. These figures are at 1995–96 prices. In the first year of the new funding arrangements, 1998–99, the savings associated with the introduction of tuition fees and the shift from maintenance grants to loans will be offset by the cost of additional loans expenditure.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment at what point in the academic year tuition fees will have to be paid; and if failure to pay will prevent a student from attending the course. [11173]

Dr. Howells: It will be for universities and colleges to determine when the fee should be paid and what should happen in the case of students who do not pay.

Educational Qualifications

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if United Kingdom students who have studied for a minimum period of one or two years will have their educational qualifications recognised in other European Union countries; and whether they will continue to qualify for European Union educational programmes and grants. [11627]

Dr. Howells: The acceptance of United Kingdom qualifications in other European countries is a matter for the appropriate authorities in the country concerned. United Kingdom students will continue to qualify for European Union programmes and grants if they satisfy the conditions of eligibility.

Bursaries and Awards

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the total cost of university grants, bursaries and maintenance awards paid to undergraduates in the last available year; and what proportion of that total was paid to undergraduates from households with net incomes of *(a)* £15,000 or less and *(b)* £15,000 to £25,000 annually. [11578]

Dr. Howells: Expenditure on mandatory awards made to students by local education authorities in England and Wales in the academic year 1995–96 was £2,059 million, of which £1,075 million was for maintenance grants. For most students, the grant is means tested primarily on the taxable income of his or her parents and not on the net income of the household. It is not possible to relate the total expenditure on grants to particular levels of parental income. However, in 1995–96, the parents of some 198,000—33 per cent.—dependent students were assessed to make a nil contribution to grant because their income was £15,510 or below. The parents of a further 149,000—25 per cent.—dependent students were assessed to make a contribution of between £45 and £1,000 because their income was between £15,510 and approximately £25,300.

Information on expenditure on bursaries and awards made by other bodies is not collected centrally.

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by his Department in each of the last five years. [11546]

Dr. Howells: The Department retains information only on the amount of recyclable wastepaper collected and this is as follows:

	Figures quoted in kilos
1992–93	82,066
1993–94	82,066
1994–95	289,001
1995–96	278,671
1996–97	196,860
Total	928,664

Recycling schemes were introduced at different points across the estate during the period covered by the question. Rationalisation of the estate.

The merger between the Department for Education and the Employment Department and a commitment to reduce the use of hard copy documents in favour of electronic documentation have also played their part in the resultant figures given.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for his Department. [11544]

Dr. Howells: Waste minimisation forms part of the Department's green housekeeping strategy. The strategy for 1997–98 is based on measuring several streams of waste collected for recycling—paper, aluminium cans, bottles, copier toner cartridges and fluorescent tubes. Within the framework of the strategy, facilities management teams on each of our four main sites—Darlington, London, Runcorn and Sheffield—decide which streams they will measure.

At the end of the year, it is intended that progress will be reviewed against the overall minimisation target and all sites will be urged to extend the range of streams to be measured during 1998–99.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste in his Department. [11545]

Dr. Howells: The Department has set a target of reducing waste by 5 per cent. during 1997–98 and plans to compare records for the period from April to September with those from October to March. The year 1997–98 will then be adopted as the base year for setting realistic future targets.

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10728]

Dr. Howells: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Consultation Exercises

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will place in the Library before the summer adjournment a list of his Department's current consultation exercises initiated since 1 May. [11796]

Dr. Howells: Since 1 May, the Department for Education and Employment has carried out, and is presently undertaking, the following consultations:

Consultations exercises which have ended

Introduction of a single school leaving date for 16-year-olds in 1998—ended 28 July

National curriculum assessment and reporting arrangements—ended 18 July

Current consultation exercises

Adult guidance

Arrangements for publication of primary school performance tables by local education authorities in 1997

Design and Implementation Advisory Group—university for industry

Draft amendments to the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulation 1995

Early years development plans for 1998–99: draft guidance for consultation

Education (Assisted Places) Regulations: statutory consultation

Employment-based routes into teaching

First aid in schools

Funding of in-service training for those involved in careers education and guidance

Higher education

Initial training and qualifications of careers advisers

Investing in young people: the right to study

New deal building partnerships

New deal national design consultation—(three events)

New deal regional conferences and events (28 in total)

Preliminary study into public sector financial control training for training and enterprise councils

Regulations to govern the approval of qualifications under section 37 (1) (b) of the Education Act 1997

School security: dealing with troublemakers

Smaller infant classes

"Successful careers in the 21st Century"—policy document on the future of the careers service

Teaching: high status, high standards—General Teaching Council

TECs and welfare to work

White Paper "Excellence in schools"

Youth service audit

The list includes both small and large-scale consultation exercises. In certain instances, the consultation is limited to a small number of key organisations and not to a scale normally associated with consultation exercises. The list does not include consultation exercises within the Department.

Windfall Tax

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals he has to include unemployed disabled people in employment and training programmes funded by the windfall tax; and if he will make a statement. [12016]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We intend that unemployed disabled people will get the help they need to meet the aim of improving their skills, employability and job prospects. Ministers have already decided that disabled people claiming jobseeker's allowance will have early access to the opportunities for work, education and training provided by the new deal for young unemployed people. We will also encourage and enable those with disabilities or a long-standing illness to access training and work, to improve their employability and thereby reduce their dependency on long-term incapacity benefits. Some £200 million from the windfall levy has been set aside to fund this and other measures.

Office Refurbishment

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has for the refurbishment of ministerial offices in his Department; and what is the estimated cost of the works and date of completion. [11872]

Dr. Howells: The only plans are to purchase appropriate furniture for the two new ministerial offices created in the DfEE headquarters building following the election. The estimated cost is £15,000 and delivery is expected within two to three months.

Tithe Farm Lower School

Sir David Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the latest position on the Office for Standards in Education inspection of Tithe Farm lower school, Houghton Regis, Bedfordshire; and if he will make a statement. [11620]

Mr. Byers: The inspection of individual schools is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector. I will, however, write to the hon. Member, setting out the statutory procedures for the production and distribution of inspection reports. I will place a copy of my letter in the Library.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for her Department. [11568]

Clare Short: My Department intends to review its management practices to ensure that we maximise energy efficiency, recycling and water saving. The review will include an examination of waste.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste in her Department. [11569]

Clare Short: There are no existing formal waste minimisation targets although my Department recycles paper and glass. Energy-efficient lighting and state-of-the-art boiler controls have been introduced in the Department's building in East Kilbride and an energy efficiency audit has also been commissioned. The Department rents its London and overseas offices, and pursues energy-efficient policies within the constraints of rented property.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by her Department in each of the last five years. [11570]

Clare Short: Records of waste paper recycling are incomplete, but the estimated quantities recycled in each of the last five years are:

1992–93: 29.7 tonnes

1993–94: 31.0 tonnes

1994–95: 31.2 tonnes

1995–96: 30.4 tonnes

1996–97: 29.0 tonnes

Data on paper usage for each of the last five years could be provided only at disproportionate expense, but the quantity recycled in 1996–97 is estimated to represent approximately 27.5 per cent. of supplies purchased in that year.

Office Refurbishment

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has for the refurbishment of ministerial offices in her Department; and what is the estimated cost of the works and date of completion. [11867]

Clare Short: Following the creation of a second ministerial post in my Department, it has been necessary to create additional ministerial office accommodation in the buildings in London and East Kilbride. Including consequential expenditure on relocating and repartitioning adjoining non-ministerial accommodation, the total estimated cost of building works was £26,263. The works are substantially complete. The cost of providing additional furniture is estimated at £19,832. No other refurbishment is planned.

North Korea

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to respond to the UNICEF appeal for aid to children in North Korea. [11288]

Clare Short: We are discussing the appeal with UNICEF and will decide on our response once we know the result of the UNICEF evaluation mission currently under way.

Aid and Trade

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the total value of aid and trade provision projects since 1978; and if she will list the top 10 *(a)* recipient countries in descending order by value of projects received and the value of ATP received by each country as a percentage of the total and *(b)* companies in descending order by value of projects received and the value of ATP received by each company as a percentage of the total. [11840]

Clare Short: The total value of commitments for aid and trade provision projects since 1978 is £1,387 million.

The top 10 recipient countries in descending order by the value of ATP commitments are:

Country	*ATP allocation (£ million)*	*Percentage of ATP total*
China	285.94	20.47
Indonesia	261.36	18.71
Malaysia	152.03	10.88
India	96.42	6.90
Turkey	89.93	6.44
Zimbabwe	55.64	3.98
Kenya	46.89	3.36
Philippines	46.52	3.33
Egypt	40.53	2.90
Morocco	37.95	2.72
Total	1,113.21	79.69
Total for all countries	[1]1,396.99	—

[1] Due to rounding the totals may not balance. The Balfour Beatty figure includes £24.37 million spent in respect of the Pergau hydro-electric project before 1994–95. This project is no longer being financed by the aid and trade provision.

It is not possible to provide figures for the amount of business retained by the prime contractor as opposed to the amount handled by subcontractors. It should, however, be noted that the extent of subcontracting is normally considerable.

The 10 companies that have won most ATP-supported business as prime contractors since 1978 are:

Company	*ATP allocation (£ million)*	*Percentage of ATP total*
Kvaerner (including the Trafalgar House Group)	188.66	13.50
GEC	155.31	10.94
Balfour Beatty	108.37	7.63
Rolls Royce (including NEI)	68.82	4.85
Biwater	66.42	4.68
AMEC	58.7	4.13
Foster Wheeler	53.85	3.79
Snamprogetti UK	47.18	3.32
Siemens Plessey	43.43	3.11
Philips UK	34.11	2.40
Total	824.85	59.04
ATP total allocated	1,396.99	—

Debt Relief Assistance

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans the Government have for assistance with debt relief for *(a)* Ethiopia, *(b)* Burkina Faso, *(c)* Burundi, *(d)* Ghana, *(e)* Kenya, *(f)* Madagascar, *(g)* Mozambique, *(h)* Nicaragua, *(i)* Rwanda, *(j)* Zimbabwe and *(k)* Uganda. [11287]

Mr. Darling: I have been asked to reply.

Debt payments due to the UK arising from export credits are rescheduled in the multilateral forum of the Paris Club. Decisions on which countries qualify for debt relief, and on the amount of relief provided, are taken on a case-by-case basis. The UK has already cancelled its aid loans to six of the countries listed, and only one of the countries, Zimbabwe, now has any such loans outstanding to the UK.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will publish the latest draft of the multilateral agreement on investment, and place a copy in the Library. [10653]

Clare Short *[pursuant to her reply, 28 July 1997, c. 56]:* The Department of Trade and Industry leads on this agreement. My hon. Friend the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry told the House on 23 July that the report that was presented to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Ministers in May 1997 on the progress of the multilateral agreement on investment is to be placed in the Library of both Houses.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if he will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by his Department in each of the last five years; [11531]

(2) what plans he has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for his Department; [11529]

(3) if he will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste within his Department. [11530]

Mr. Tom Clarke: My Department recycled approximately 32 tonnes of paper last year, but no records are available for previous years. Arrangements are now being made to record the proportion of all waste paper which is recycled.

As part of a green housekeeping strategy, my Department is committed to adopting the best environment practices wherever possible and practicable, including reducing the amount of waste produced and maximising that which is recycled. Initiatives already implemented include guidance to staff on paper-saving practices such as using electronic mail, double-side copying, and reusing envelopes, the installation of green bins to collect paper or cardboard for recycling and schemes introduced for the recycling of cans, plastic cups, and printer toner cartridges.

A waste audit was recently undertaken and we will use the results of the audit to help us set a target for minimising waste by the end of August.

Newstead Abbey

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received about the possible undermining of Newstead abbey; what steps he is taking; and if he will make a statement. [11903]

Mr. Banks: Representations have been received from the Byron Society, the Newstead Abbey Byron Society, the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire and four individuals. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is very concerned by reports that the mining will have adverse effects on the structure of these nationally important buildings and is considering what can be done to mitigate the likely impact on these structures or prevent damage from occurring.

Museums and Galleries Commission

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement in respect of the grant in aid his Department proposes to give to the Museums and Galleries Commission until 2000. [11700]

Mr. Fisher: The Museums and Galleries Commission's grant in aid for the financial year 1997–98 is £8,904,000. The indicative figures for the next two years are:

1998–99: £8,826,000

1999–2000: £8,693,000

Firm allocations for 1998–99 will be announced in the autumn.

Office Refurbishment

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has for the refurbishment of ministerial offices in his Department; and what is the estimated cost of the works and date of completion. [11875]

Mr. Tom Clarke: My Department is creating a new office for the additional Minister announced following the election. This involves work to one other Minister's office and moving some private offices. In total, five offices will be redecorated. As this work is being tendered, the estimated cost is commercially sensitive at present.

Sports Broadcasting

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will introduce a development levy on television contracts with sporting clubs and ruling bodies to assist funding for youth development of sport. [11949]

Mr. Banks: Although I am not persuaded that a statutory levy is justified, the Government do want to see sports bodies re-investing a good proportion of television money into youth development of their sports. The sports' own code of conduct on the sale of television rights itself accepts this point.

Tourism (Dramatic Arts)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the contribution of British dramatic arts to the promotion of inbound tourism in *(a)* London and *(b)* the United Kingdom. [11702]

Mr. Tom Clarke: In 1995, 49 per cent. of visitors said that our theatres and performing arts were an important part of their decision to come to Britain. In 1996, 35 per cent. of overseas visitors to London said that London's culture and arts had greatly encouraged them to visit and a further 41 per cent. said that culture and arts had influenced their decision to come. The British Tourist Authority fully recognises the importance of arts and culture in attracting overseas visitors, and these play an integral role in its overseas marketing campaigns.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the impact of rises in ticket prices to dramatic arts venues in London on the United Kingdom tourism industry. [11703]

Mr. Clarke: The latest available information from the society of London Theatres, from 1991, showed that up to one third of seats in London's theatres were filled by overseas visitors and many other by domestic tourists. I understand that the society will be updating this information later this year. The English tourist board announced last week that tourist spending in England rose by 7 per cent. to a record level of £10.7 billion in 1996. The British Tourist Authority estimates that earnings from overseas tourism in 1996 increased by 5 per cent. to £12.69 billion. All the evidence therefore suggests that London continues to attract record numbers of visitors.

Museums and Galleries (Lottery Funding)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures are being taken to ensure an equitable distribution of lottery funds to museums and galleries across the United Kingdom. [11701]

Mr. Banks: The national lottery distributing bodies have already announced awards worth over £465 million to museums and galleries throughout the country, notably through the Heritage Lottery Fund's major museum, library and archive projects programme which aims to achieve a good regional spread of major projects across the United Kingdom.

The White Paper "The People's Lottery", Cm3709, published on 21 July, makes clear the Government's objective that there should be more confidence that lottery money generally is allocated fairly and equitably in the light of need across all regions and parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to extend the use of heritage lottery funding in respect of museums and galleries projects. [11699]

Mr. Banks: The National Heritage Act 1997 will extend the powers of the trustees of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and enable them to support a wider range of projects and applicants. The powers will open up new opportunities for the Heritage Lottery Fund to assist museum and gallery projects. The Heritage Lottery Fund is currently consulting on the use of the wider powers. We are considering implementation of the Act as part of our wider review of lottery distribution.

Millennium Commission Grants

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if he will list by local authority area in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England the (i) number and (ii) value of Millennium Commission grants made in each year to date. [7221]

Mr. Chris Smith: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to my hon. Friend in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Lottery Awards

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list, for each category of national lottery good causes, how much money has been

awarded to individuals or organisations in the Chorley parliamentary constituency in each year since the lottery was established. [11219]

Mr. Banks: To date, over £3.7 billion has been awarded to 27,387 projects throughout the UK. Of these, 19 awards worth £534,962 have been made to projects in Chorley. Annual breakdowns are set out in the following table.

Distributing body	*Total amount £*	*Number of awards*
1995		
Arts Council of England	—	0
Heritage Lottery Fund	—	0
Millennium Commission	—	0
National Lottery Charities Board	53,328	3
Sports Council	43,523	1
Total for 1995	96,851	4
1996		
Arts Council of England	—	0
Heritage Lottery Fund	97,130	2
Millennium Commission	—	0
National Lottery Charities Board	324,313	10
Sports Council	9,118	1
Total for 1996	430,561	13
1997		
Arts Council of England	7,550	2
Heritage Lottery Fund	—	0
Millennium Commission	—	0
National Lottery Charities Board	—	0
Sport Council	—	0
Total for 1997	7,550	2
Grand total	534,962	19

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list, for each category of national lottery good causes, how much money has been *(a)* given and *(b)* awarded in the Government regions of (i) London, (ii) the north-west, (iii) Merseyside and (iv) the south-east, in each of the years since the lottery was established. [11220]

Mr. Banks: To date, over £3.7 billion has been awarded to 27,387 projects throughout the UK. An annual breakdown of the awards in London, the north-west, Merseyside and the south-east is set out in the following table. Figures for the amounts already drawn down by region are not held centrally.

	Region							
	London[1]		*Merseyside*		*North-west*		*South-east*	
Distributing body	*Amount £*	*Awards*	*Amount £*	*Awards*	*Amount £*	*Awards*	*Amount £*	*Awards*
1995								
Arts Council	126,468,346	81	3,225,848	10	7,318,924	41	12,526,983	45
Charities Board	28,804,775	328	6,504,451	105	13,403,172	221	13,412,786	240
Sports Council	4,840,007	34	4,108,997	9	9,293,546	61	25,168,932	121
Heritage Lottery Fund	23,785,882	20	90,000	1	4,600,619	7	1,304,642	12
Millennium Commission[2]	52,200,000	2	1,668,500	1	12,431,702	2	70,891,500	5
1995 total	236,099,010	465	15,597,796	126	47,047,963	332	123,304,843	423
1996								
Arts Council	163,399,606	173	2,050,243	15	69,810,976	84	40,639,873	84
Charities Board	52,367,043	559	11,229,820	141	27,542,094	361	25,752,757	410
Sports Council	31,921,074	71	3,409,903	14	15,159,624	113	32,160,530	212
Heritage Lottery Fund	125,134,428	59	4,010,000	4	14,158,065	36	15,293,204	39
Millennium Commission	52,943,718	5	—	0	19,065,549	3	4,296,850	6
1996 total	425,765,869	867	20,699,966	174	145,736,308	597	118,143,214	751
1997								
Arts Council	35,794,183	893	2,857,883	40	22,961,547	159	10,564,722	583
Charities Board	5,994,942	36	—	0	197,359	3	1,509,190	12
Sports Council	46,073,489	45	6,309,089	6	53,787,600	74	36,365,440	122
Heritage Lottery Fund	60,629,091	68	9,706,100	9	51,888,958	46	26,842,758	62
Millennium Commission	—	0	28,721,195	2	2,700,000	1	329,800	1
1997 total	148,491,705	1,042	47,594,267	57	131,535,464	283	75,611,910	780
Grand total	810,356,581	2,374	83,892,029	357	324,319,735	1,212	317,059,967	1,954

[1] Awards to bodies based in London include many to institutions that are of national importance and are of benefit to the country as a whole. Awards to these organisations account for 60 per cent. (approximately £485 million) of the total so far awarded to London.

[2] Figures for Millennium Commission awards cover capital projects only and so exclude the Millennium Awards scheme.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funding is presently committed from his departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [11894]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The cost of preventive and remedial action on year 2000 will be met from existing public expenditure survey provision. The Department is following the guidance published by CCTA. A detailed and costed action plan is being drawn up.

English Sports Council

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement about the appointment of ministerial nominees to the regions of the English Sports Council. [21319]

Mr. Banks: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has previously announced that, as part of our new approach to sport, we are looking at the way that the current sports council structures are working. As part of that review, we have looked carefully at the regional structure of the English Sports Council, the proposed role of ministerial nominees to the council's regional offices, and the relationship between the council and local authorities and governing bodies of sport in the regions. While there is still work to be done on what new arrangements might be introduced, my right hon. Friend and I have decided to stand down all the ministerial nominees that have either been formally appointed or were nominees-designate to work alongside the English Sports Council.

This decision is no reflection on the ability of the individuals concerned to play a part in developing the Government's plans for sport. I will make a further announcement later this year about how we intend to rebuild the relationships between the English Sports Council and its partners in the regions, which were once so strong, and to help ensure that the role of local government and of local sport organisations in providing sports opportunities are given the credit they deserve.

Television Broadcasters

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will require public television broadcasters to ensure that all public information, party political and party election broadcasts are fully accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing people in the United Kingdom. [12001]

Mr. Fisher: The Broadcasting Act 1990 set a target of 50 per cent. of transmissions for subtitling of programmes by 1998 for Channel 3 services and by the fifth anniversary of the commencement of the service for Channel 5. After that target is reached, it is for the Independent Television Commission to set the level of future targets. It is also a condition of the Channel 4 licence to ensure that 50 per cent. of its programmes are subtitled by 1998. I understand from the ITC that all Channel 3 licensees subtitle all their national news programmes and current affairs programmes and that Channel 4 subtitle their main news and current affairs programmes. Party political broadcasts are also subtitled.

Under the terms of the Broadcasting Act 1996, digital terrestrial television services have to meet a target of subtitling 50 per cent. of programmes by the 10th anniversary of the digital programme service starting. The 1996 Act required the Independent Television Commission to draw up a code on promoting the understanding and enjoyment of programmes by persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. As part of that code, the Independent Television Commission has also set interim targets for subtitling digital services.

In its statement of promises to viewers and listeners, the BBC is committed to subtitling 50 per cent of all its programmes by 1998. The statement also contains a commitment to subtitle all national daily news programmes, regional news and current affairs broadcasts.

The existing arrangements allow the ITC and the BBC flexibility to meet viewers' needs as fully as possible, constrained by statutory minimum subtitling levels and by what is technically and financially realistic. Within these arrangements, broadcasters place particular emphasis naturally on subtitling programmes which inform viewers of news and current affairs. The detailed arrangements for determining which programmes are subtitled, however, are not a matter for government.

National Lottery

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will request Camelot to install national lottery terminals in villages in remote rural areas; and if he will make a statement. [11167]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. I have, therefore, asked the Director General of the National Lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to the hon. Member, and copies of his response will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Our proposals for the future of the national lottery were set out in the White Paper "The People's Lottery" published on Monday 21 July. The White Paper makes clear our concern to protect the contribution which the lottery makes to small retailers throughout the country. The impact on retailers will, therefore, be taken into account when choosing the next operator of the national lottery.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was raised for good causes by the national lottery between November 1994 and April 1997. [11162]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The national lottery raised £3,208,646,966 for the good causes between 19 November 1994 and 31 March 1997.

Millennium Commission

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if he will list those projects funded by the Millennium Commission in *(a)* Nottinghamshire and *(b)* the east midlands; [9128]

(2) if he will list by region the expenditure allocated by the Millennium Commission. [9129]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 17 July 1997]:* These are matters for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to my hon. Friend in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what Millennium Commission funding has been allocated to projects in *(a)* The Wrekin, *(b)* Shropshire and *(c)* the west midlands. [7777]

Mr. Smith *[holding answer 10 July 1997]:* This is a matter for the Millennium Commission, I shall write to my hon. Friend in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the Millennium Commission will continue in existence after 2000; if it will remain responsible for the millennium experience at Greenwich; and what responsibility it will retain for financial shortfalls in respect of the millennium experience. [6479]

Mr. Smith: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Millennium Celebrations

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the budget set aside for the millennium celebrations; and what percentage of that budget will be designated for projects in each of (i) Scotland, (ii) Wales, (iii) Northern Ireland, (iv) England (excluding London), and (v) London. [6130]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 3 July 1997]:* It is estimated that, by the end of 2000, over £2 billion of national lottery proceeds will have been disbursed by the Millennium Commission on capital projects to mark the millennium, on the millennium awards scheme, and on the national millennium experience and its regional programme. While it aims for an equitable regional distribution of grant, the Millennium Commission does not designate portions of its budget for projects in particular regions of the United Kingdom.

No central Government expenditure on millennium celebrations is planned, other than approximately £40,000 per annum to support the work of the millennium co-ordinating group and its sub-groups.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what fee he estimates Mark McCormack International will receive from its consultancy for the millennium experience; and if he will make a statement. [6601]

Mr. Smith *[holding answer 7 July 1997]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what factors led him to adopt his present policy on the millennium dome; and if he will make a statement. [6902]

Mr. Smith *[holding answer 7 July 1997]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before the summer recess. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Sport (Spectators)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what reports his Department receives of spectator attendance at *(a)* premier, first, second and third division association football matches, *(b)* county cricket matches, *(c)* super league, first and second division rugby league matches, *(d)* Courage division 1 and 2 rugby union matches; and if he will make a statement. [6975]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 9 July 1997]:* The Department does not receive reports of attendances at these matches, but has access to them when necessary from the governing bodies of the sports concerned.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prisoner Transfers

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what monitoring arrangements exist at the embassy in Dublin concerning prisoner transfer agreements with the Irish Government; and if she will make a statement about early releases to date. [10475]

Mr. Ingram: There have been no prisoner transfers from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland; nor have there been any requests for such transfers.

Postal and Proxy Votes

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals listed on *(a)* the postal vote and *(b)* the proxy vote permanent register obtained postal and proxy votes for each election since 1992. [8691]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The following is the information:

Permanent list of absent voters

Year	*Date of election*	*Type of election*	*Postal*	*Postal proxy*	*Proxy*	*Total*
1992	9 April	Parliamentary General	12,980	17	2,521	15,518
1993	19 May	Local Government	8,259	28	1,642	9,929
1994	9 June	European Parliamentary		Not available		
1996	30 May	Northern Ireland Elections	14,377	21	1,769	16,167
1997	1 May	Parliamentary	15,236	36	1,985	17,257
1997	21 May	Local Government	19,959	33	2,378	22,370

Mr. Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list by constituency the number of applications signed by individual doctors and the reason given for *(a)* postal votes and *(b)* proxy votes for the 1997 general election. [8693]

Mr. Murphy: Records of absent vote applications are not currently stored in a way that would readily provide information on reasons for application and individual doctors attestations.

The chief electoral officer has instituted a review of all absent vote applications for the last three elections in Northern Ireland and any relevant conclusions of the report may be published in due course.

Mr. Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications for *(a)* postal votes and *(b)* proxy votes have been refused for each election since 1992. [8692]

Mr. Murphy: Until 1996, absent vote applications were dealt with by area offices and as a consequence no records are available for the numbers of applications refused in previous years. For the 1997 elections, a central absent voting unit was established.

Significant numbers of applications were received in good time, but were incomplete and had to be returned to the applicant. In such cases, each applicant received a letter of explanation and was invited to resubmit their correctly completed form. However, large numbers of applications were received in the last hours before cut-off time for receipt of applications and, in these circumstances, it was not possible to return incomplete applications to applicants.

Parliamentary election—1 May 1997

Reason	*Number*
Applicant not registered elector	320
Received too late	300
Insufficient or no reason	162
Dual/treble attestation	126
Not attested or not properly attested	145
Not signed	66
Medical reason, non-physical illness	98
Medical (not properly completed)	64
Proxy information not completed	9
Letters returned by Post Office	5
Signature not accepted	3
Too late, received after "late" closing date	3
No date of election given	2
Miscellaneous	115
Total	1,418

Local Government election—21 May 1997

Reason	*Number*
Applicant not registered elector	275
Received too late	398
No reason given	69
Insufficient information	88
Not attested	128
Dual/treble attestation	112
Not signed	121
Medical Non-physical illness	69
Miscellaneous	232
Total	1,492

Mr. Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list, by constituency, the number of individuals listed on the permanent list for *(a)* postal votes and *(b)* proxy votes. [8690]

Mr. Murphy: The information is as follows:

Permanent absent voters by constituency (as at 18 July 1997)

Constituency	*Proxy*	*Postal*	*Total*
Belfast East	114	572	686
Belfast North	101	572	673
Belfast South	98	531	629
Belfast West	80	430	510
East Antrim	189	372	561
East Londonderry	46	1,254	1,300
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	293	3,270	3,563
Foyle	116	993	1,109
Lagan Valley	118	916	1,034
Mid Ulster	77	2,529	2,606
North Antrim	123	760	883
North Down	150	554	704
Newry and Armagh	77	1,656	1,733
South Antrim	180	450	630
South Down	264	1,909	2,173
Strangford	136	705	841
Upper Bann	75	1,101	1,176
West Tyrone	253	2,087	2,340
Total	2,490	20,661	23,151

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the alleged injuries caused by plastic baton rounds since 1981 were *(a)* alleged to have been caused by rounds fired from a distance of less than 20m and *(b)* alleged to be injuries to the groin, buttocks or higher body parts. [9922]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 24 July 1997]:* The information is not held in the form requested. However, the Royal Ulster Constabulary has supplied the following:

Alleged PBR deaths/injuries

	Deaths	*Injuries*
1981[1]	7	216
1982	1	4
1983	—	8
1984	1	41
1985	—	12
1986	1	59
1987	—	40
1988	—	22
1989	1	25
1990	—	12
1991	—	10
1992	—	8
1993	—	14
1994	—	13
1995	—	7
1996	—	73
1997[2]	—	3
Total	11	667

[1] Figures do not include five persons allegedly killed by baton rounds prior to 1981.

[2] To 30 June.

Total deaths allegedly caused by baton rounds 1972 to date: 16.

IRA Punishment Beatings

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many murders, maimings and beatings described as punishment beatings were carried out by the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland *(a)* following the Provisional IRA's ceasefire declaration from midnight on 31 August 1994 to 6 pm on 9 February 1996 and *(b)* during the Provisional IRA's renewed terrorist campaign from 6 pm on 9 February 1996 to midday on 20 July 1997, on which their latest ceasefire declaration was announced. [10565]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* The information is not available in the format requested and would incur disproportionate cost to provide. The table, however, illustrates the number of deaths that have occurred directly due to the security situation and those casualties attributed to paramilitary style attacks by "Republican" organisations. The Royal Ulster Constabulary uses the term "paramilitary assaults" as opposed to punishment beatings as the latter tends to imply a certain justification for these appalling offences.

Deaths due to the security situation caused by Republican organisations

	Number of deaths
1 September 1994 to 9 February 1996 (1800 hours)	[1]10
9 February 1996 (1800 hours) to 20 July 1997 (1200 hours)	11

[1] This figure includes one RUC officer who died as a result of injuries sustained in 1973.

Casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks by Republican organisations

	Number of casualties
Casualties as a result of paramility style assaults	
1 September 1994 to 9 February 1996 (1800 hours)	183
9 February 1996 (1800 hours) to 20 July 1997 (1200 hours)	209
Casualties as a result of paramilitary style shootings	
1 September 1994 to 9 February 1996 (1800 hours)	Nil
9 February 1996 (1800 hours) to 20 July 1997 (1200 hours)	18

Departmental Payroll

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list each of the functions relating to the payroll for which her Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [10745]

Mr. Paul Murphy: For the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments, the available information is as follows:

The Department of Finance and Personnel provides a centralised non-industrial payroll service to NI Departments and NI civil servants employed by the NIO. For 1996–97, the total cost of the systems and processes, including the costs of the personnel section in each NI Department, was £2,303,202.

The Department of Education for Northern Ireland operates a teachers' payroll system which pays salaries to teachers in most schools and colleges on behalf of their employing authorities. Costs for 1996–97 were £886,612.

The Department of the Environment (NI) operates a payroll system for weekly paid industrial staff. Costs for 1996–97 were £1,774,713.

The Department of Agriculture (NI) operates a payroll system for weekly paid industrial staff. Costs for 1996–97 were £439,721.

The Northern Ireland Office has a contract with Chessington Computer Services Ltd., for the provision of a payroll service for the home civil service staff. The terms of the contract are commercial in confidence.

Absent Voting Papers

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of absent voting papers issued in (i) each parliamentary constituency for the 1996 forum election and (ii) the 1997 general election; and what steps she is taking to reduce electoral fraud. [10272]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* I have viewed with concern allegations that there is a significant level of electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. I will study the results of the chief electoral officer's investigations into postal vote applications with interest.

	Parliamentary general election 1 May 1997		*Northern Ireland elections 30 May 1996*	
Constituency	*Total number of postal ballot papers issued*	*As a percentage of total constituency electorate*	*Number of postal ballot papers issued*	*As a percentage of total constituency electorate*
Belfast East	748	1.21	635	1.02
Belfast North	656	1.01	566	0.87
Belfast South	694	1.09	621	0.97
Belfast West	687	1.11	458	0.75
East Antrim	559	0.95	575	0.99
East Londonderry	1,750	2.97	1,517	2.59
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	4,927	7.61	4,336	6.81
Foyle	1,102	1.62	1,081	1.62
Lagan Valley	1,231	1.73	1,065	1.52
Mid Ulster	3,609	6.11	2,676	4.64
North Antrim	1,260	1.74	1,105	1.54
North Down	812	1.30	713	1.14
Newry and Armagh	3,021	4.27	2,174	3.11
South Antrim	654	0.94	698	1.01
South Down	2,447	3.50	2,115	3.06
Strangford	1,057	1.51	872	1.26
Upper Bann	1,561	2.21	1,546	2.21
West Tyrone	3,062	5.24	1,913	3.34
Total	29,844	2.53	24,666	2.12

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the different reasons, by number and percentage, for which absent voting papers were issued in each *(a)* parliamentary constituency and *(b)* council area in the 1997 general elections; and if she will make a statement on her policy in relation to discrepancies between Northern Ireland electoral laws and rules and those pertaining to the rest of the United Kingdom. [10122]

Mr. Murphy *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* Regulations specifying the grounds upon which absent voting papers may be issued for a both parliamentary and local government elections are set in statute. In both cases, the chief electoral officer shall grant an application if he is satisfied that the applicant's circumstances on the date of the poll will, or are likely to be such, that he cannot reasonably be expected to vote in person. There may be almost as many circumstances which qualify as there are applications, and so it would be impossible to list them all here.

I do not consider that there are discrepancies between Northern Ireland's electoral laws and rules and those pertaining to the rest of the United Kingdom. There are clearly differences, but no more than are necessary to facilitate the different circumstances in Northern Ireland, not least of which is a system of single transferable vote proportional representation for local government and European parliamentary elections.

Electors

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many electors in each constituency are registered from addresses outside the United Kingdom; and if she will list the top five countries where such electors reside, indicating the numbers involved. [10313]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* In accordance with regulation 34 of the Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) Regulations 1986, the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland publishes each year a list of overseas electors which gives details of the elector's name, the constituency in which they are registered and their declared present address.

Overseas electors—1997 Register of electors

Constituency	*Number of electors*
Belfast East	5
Belfast North	8
Belfast South	5
Belfast West	3
East Antrim	3
East Londonderry	2
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	10
Foyle	5
Lagan Valley	3
Mid-Ulster	5
Newry & Armagh	5
North Antrim	7
North Down	13
South Antrim	2
South Down	5
Strangford	7
Upper Bann	4
West Tyrone	5
Total	97

The top five in the league table of countries where registered Northern Ireland overseas electors reside accounts for 60 per cent. of the total number of overseas electors.

Country of residence	*Number of electors registered*
United States of America	17
Belgium	13
France	7
Republic of South Africa	5
Canada	4
Australia	4
Spain	4
Germany	4

Electoral Reform Committee

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will ask the chief electoral officer to give evidence to the Electoral Reform Committee of the Northern Ireland Forum for Peace and Dialogue. [10314]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The chief electoral officer is an independent office whose duties are clearly established by statute.

It would not be appropriate for me to ask the chief electoral officer to do anything without those duties. I am aware, however, that the chief electoral officer has made clear that he is always prepared to see elected representatives at his office to discuss those matters within his area of responsibility.

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many payments were made under the arable area payments scheme in 1996 of *(a)* £0 to £1,000, *(b)* £1,000 to £2,000, *(c)* £2,000 to £3,000, *(d)* £3,000 to £4,000, *(e)* £4,000 to £5,000, *(f)* £5,000 to £10,000, *(g)* £10,000 to £20,000, *(h)* £20,000 to £50,000 and (i) over £50,000. [11315]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* The number of payments made in 1996 under the arable area payments scheme were *(a)* 1,172 from £0 to £1,000, *(b)* 878 from £1,000 to £2,000, *(c)* 424 from £2,000 to £3,000, *(d)* 348 from £3,000 to £4,000, *(e)* 347 from £4,000 to £5,000, *(f)* 67 from £5,000 to £10,000, *(g)* 87 from £10,000 to £20,000, *(h)* 46 from £20,000 to £50,000 (i) three over £50,000.

European Parliament Elections

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the implications for Northern Ireland of the Government's plans to introduce a list system of proportional representation for European Parliament elections. [10474]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My officials will be considering whether it would be in Northern Ireland's best interests to be included in any British system of PR for European parliamentary elections, or whether Northern Ireland should retain its existing model of PR or something similar. The overriding criterion will be what is best for Northern Ireland. I would be interested to receive the views of the Northern Ireland parties on this matter.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer of 23 June, *Official Report,* column *404,* if she will make it her policy to ensure that disability living allowance reviews and appeals are costed and the price published; and if she will make a statement on the success rate for reviews and appeals. [10476]

Mr. Worthington: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie, and I have asked him to arrange for a response to be given.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Robert McCartney, dated 29 July 1997:

> I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question on the costs and success rate of Disability Living Allowance reviews and appeals.
>
> As explained in my letter of 17 June 1997, the Social Security Agency does not maintain records on the costs of Disability Living Allowance reviews and appeals, processes to which people who are dissatisfied with adjudication officer decisions have a statutory right of access. Compiling and maintaining this information would require a major clerical work programme at disproportionate costs and the Agency has no plans to introduce such a system.
>
> Current available information indicates that around one third of reviews and appeals for Disability Living Allowance are successful. This is broadly in line with other similar benefits. While the Agency aims to get as many decisions as possible correct at the initial claim stage, it frequently happens that, when given a decision on their application, customers provide further evidence of their disability which then has to be reviewed. This is the main reason for the success rate for reviews and appeals.
>
> I hope this explains the position for you but I would be happy to provide any further information you require.

Education (Schools) Bill

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will ensure that Northern Ireland is covered by the Education (Schools) Bill. [10477]

Mr. Worthington: Separate legislation is being prepared to give effect to class size requirements in Northern Ireland.

Parades

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many parades have taken place in Northern Ireland in the current year; how many were organised by *(a)* the Orange Order, *(b)* the Royal Black Institution, *(c)* the Apprentice Boys of Derry, *(d)* The Ancient Order of Hibernians, *(e)* children and youth organisations, such as boys and girls brigades, scouts, *(f)* the Royal British Legion, *(g)* Sinn Fein, *(h)* trade unions and *(i)* other organisations and individuals. [11501]

Mr. Ingram: The information is not currently available in the format requested and would incur disproportionate cost to provide. I can, however, give details of the number of parades which have taken place in Northern Ireland in the current year which are described as either loyalist, nationalist or other.

Parades held from 1 January 1997 to 27 July 1997

	Number
Loyalist	1,576
Nationalist	114
Other	254
Total	1,944

The statistics may be subject to adjustment.

Violent Crime

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list for each month since 1 January 1994 the number of arson attacks and explosive attacks which have been made on *(a)* churches, by denomination *(b)* other church property, *(c)* Ancient Order of Hibernians halls, *(d)* Gaelic Athletic Association buildings, *(e)* Orange halls, *(f)* other halls, *(g)* private houses, *(h)* integrated schools, *(i)* maintained schools, *(j)* controlled schools and *(k)* voluntary schools; [11499]

(2) if she will list for the months of May, June and July to date in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1997 the numbers of incidents in which (i) petrol bombs were thrown at the security forces, (ii) firearms were used against the security forces and (iii) the security forces were attacked with stones or other missiles, broken down by town or police sub-division, giving (1) the duration of the assaults, (2) the numbers of persons involved and (3) the numbers of petrol bombs used; [11500]

(3) how many punishment beatings and shootings there have been in each month, broken down by police division, since 1 January 1994; and if he will indicate *(a)* which terrorist or paramilitary body was responsible and *(b)* how many were (i) republican and (ii) loyalist inspired. [11507]

Mr. Ingram: I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Stolen Vehicles

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list for the months of May, June and July to date the numbers of vehicles stolen in each police sub-division in Northern Ireland this year and in (i) 1995 and (ii) 1996; how many of them were *(a)* recovered and *(b)* destroyed; and what estimate she has made of the costs of each case of damage in each sub-division in each year. [11503]

Mr. Ingram: I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Stormont Talks (Bodyguards)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which delegations of participants in the all-party talks at Stormont have bodyguards within the castle buildings precincts; which of these bodyguards are armed; and if she will make a statement. [10432]

Mr. Ingram: I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Bus Operators (Fuel Costs)

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate she has made of *(a)* the cost to public transport bus operators resulting from the increase in fuel costs announced in the Budget and *(b)* its effect on the cost of travel by bus. [11617]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I understand that Ulsterbus and Citybus, which operate the great bulk of bus services in Northern Ireland, estimate that the increase in fuel duty will add around £850,000 a year to their costs. As a result, they increased bus fares by an average of 1.75 per cent. on July 28.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funding is presently committed from her departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and if she will make a statement. [11895]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Northern Ireland Departments, together with the Northern Ireland Office, are each responsible for their own expenditure programmes. In each case the cost of rectifying the year 2000 problem will be met out of their existing public expenditure survey provision. The exact costs involved will not be known until later in the year when the Departments will have completed a set of fully costed plans for the work involved. At that point, the original expenditure programmes may have to be adjusted.

Employment Advertisements

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how often since 1992 her Department has been responsible for employment advertisements which contained age restrictions upon those who could apply. [9512]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is her estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–2000; and if she will make a statement. [11392]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:*

For the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments, the information is as follows:

£ thousand

	Current	*Capital*
1995–96[1]	25,316	16,319
1996–97[1]	26,415	17,466
1997–98	26,821	18,202
1998–99	31,991	16,500
1999–2000	34,383	14,875

[1] Actual expenditure.

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if she will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste within her Department; [11566]

(2) what plans she has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for her Department; [11565]

(3) if she will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by her Department in each of the last five years. [11567]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Telecommunications Towers

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list *(a)* the number of planning applications for telecommunications towers made by each of the telecommunications companies operating in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years and the current year to the latest available date, *(b)* the number of such towers erected by each such company in each year, *(c)* the number of such towers erected for which planning permission was not needed and *(d)* her estimate of the total number of such towers which will be needed by each company to complete their network. [12187]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Organic Farming

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate she has made of *(a)* the present average yield of each of the principal farm crops and *(b)* the comparable yields if all farmers were to convert to organic farming. [12188]

Mr Paul Murphy: *(a)* The average yields of each of the main farm crops in 1996 and for the previous five years are given in the table.

tonnes per hectare

	1996	*Average 1991 to 1995*
Spring barley	5.03	4.26
Winter barley	6.64	5.78
Wheat	7.70	6.87
Oats	5.07	4.62
Potatoes (maincrop/ware and seed)	29.93	27.23

(b) The organic sector in Northern Ireland is too small to provide reliable estimates of comparable yields.

Social Security

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action will be taken in Northern Ireland to involve the private sector in delivery of social security services. [12276]

Mr. Worthington: The Government's objective is to create a modern welfare state where social security benefits are to bring people into mainstream society and are not simply hand-outs. The delivery of benefits has to be modernised as well as the system itself. Privatisation is not the only way of improving quality and reducing costs, but we see no reason why the public sector should deliver services if there are more efficient ways of doing so. The Society Security Agency, in conjunction with the Benefits Agency, has initiated a project to involve private sector consortiums to explore opportunities for the modernisation of service delay. This project fits well with our approach to public-private sector partnerships and action on it will continue. Specific details will soon be announced by the chief executive of the Social Security Agency.

Alongside this, whenever the private sector is used in the future, the arrangements will be strengthened to:

Define a minimum quality of service threshold when we assess bids.

Contracts will not be awarded if a supplier fails to reach this threshold.

Place greater emphasis on evaluation of suppliers' management of staff transfers.

Provide guidance to potential and current suppliers to make clear what we consider to be good employment practice.

Strengthen contract monitoring to assess suppliers' performance including quality of service, management of people, cost efficiency, evaluation and feedback on performance.

I believe that this approach will ensure that the best possible social security service will be delivered to people in Northern Ireland by committed staff at the right cost to the taxpayer.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

A406 (Upgrading Contracts)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the contracts to upgrade the A406 at Sterling way and Fore street to be completed; and what steps he is taking to remedy the delays already announced on these contracts. [10677]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Andrew Love, dated 31 July 1997:

The Minister for Transport in London has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the improvements to the A406 at Sterling Way and Fore Street.

The contract to improve this part of the A406 is expected to be completed by late Spring of 1998. However, the completion of the underpass which will take the A406 under the existing Fore Street junction and Railtrack's Silver Street Station, should be completed 2 to 3 months prior to the completion of the full contract.

The delays have mainly been caused by the contractor encountering unexpected ground conditions during piling operations. The contractor is reducing the effect by increasing his resources and reviewing his construction methods. There are no plans to accelerate the main works to achieve an earlier completion date, because it would be costly. The Contractor is already working 7am to 7pm and extending those hours would create unacceptable disturbance. Other constraints on the sequence of work are imposed by lane closures and fitting out the tunnel.

Smoky Vehicle Hotline

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many complaints have been received by the Vehicle Inspectorate's smoky vehicle hotline in each of the last five years; and how many prosecutions have resulted from complaints in each year. [11466]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the chief executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 31 July 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the number of complaints received by the Vehicle Inspectorate's Smoky Vehicle Hotline in each of the last 5 years; and how many prosecutions have resulted from complaints in each year.

The total number of reports received via the Hotline for each of the past 5 years is as follows:

1992/93: 2,481

1993/94: 2,887

1994/95: 8,113

1995/96: 16,304

1996/97: 11,622

We do not have details of the number of prosecutions arising from these reports. Vehicle operators are initially asked to supply written evidence that the vehicle reported on complies with emissions limits. In cases where there is evidence of non-compliance, details are added to the maintenance data held on the vehicle operator (which includes previous Hotline reports). The information is used by the Inspectorate on a cumulative basis to target enforcement action against operators with apparent unsatisfactory maintenance standards. Follow-up action may result in prosecutions and/or action by Traffic Commissioners against a vehicle operators' licence.

Freight Grants

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to publish revised guidance on freight grants; and if he will make a statement. [12076]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department is currently preparing a revised guide. It will be published shortly.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the costs of discretionary blight payments to people in homes near the Birmingham northern relief road; and what contribution to these costs will be paid by Midland Expressway Ltd. [12260]

Dr. Strang: The total cost attributable to discretionary purchase under sections 246(2)(a)/(b) and 248 of the Highways Act 1980 is some £1.5 million. The full cost of acquiring all land and property for the Birmingham northern relief road and compensation payments will be met by Midland Expressway Ltd.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what controls he will have on the level of tolls on the Birmingham northern relief road and the rates charged for heavy goods vehicles relative to those for other vehicles. [12259]

Dr. Strang: The level of tolls and their applications to different classes of vehicle will under the legislation be matters for the concessionaire.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he has made a cost-benefit analysis of the long-term economic advantages of the Birmingham northern relief road. [12257]

Dr. Strang: A cost benefit analysis carried out in 1991 showed the scheme proposed by Midland Expressway Ltd. having a benefit:cost ratio of more than 2:1.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many subcontractors to Midland Expressway Ltd. for the Birmingham northern relief road project are companies in the *(a)* Kvaerner Group and *(b)* Autostrada Group. [12256]

Dr. Strang: The construction of the Birmingham northern relief road will be controlled by companies associated with the Kvaerner and Autostrada Groups. The work to be subcontracted will be specified at a later stage.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what forecasts his Department has made of the effect of the Birmingham northern relief road on the percentage change in traffic levels on motorways in the west midlands. [12258]

Dr. Strang: The Birmingham northern relief road will provide a high-quality free-flowing route for through traffic to bypass the very heavily congested section of the M6 between junctions 4 and 11. The M6 will remain a high-standard route through the west midlands conurbation and is expected to be used to the full extent of its available capacity. Removal of through traffic from the M6 will enable traffic from lower standard local roads and trunk roads to use the M6, thereby easing traffic flows on those routes. As a consequence, M6 traffic levels are not forecast to reduce to a significant extent.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the details of the penalty clause in the contract between the Government and Midland Expressway Ltd. in relation to the Birmingham northern relief road, including the compensation which would be payable *(a)* to Midland Expressway Ltd. and *(b)* to other parties and subcontractors if the Birmingham northern relief road did not go ahead. [12255]

Dr. Strang: The BNRR concession agreement includes a number of detailed provisions for compensation payable by either party if the agreement is terminated under various possible circumstances. Under those provisions, the risk that the public inquiry outcome did not allow the scheme to proceed rests wholly with the concessionaire.

I will write to my hon. Friend with further details on this matter.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library a copy of the concession agreement covering the Birmingham northern relief road. [12229]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I will arrange for a copy of the concession statement that was put before the public inquiry to be placed in the Library, and will consider further with the concessionaire what further material can be provided.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will issue planning guidance to restrict development along the Birmingham northern relief road corridor. [12261]

Angela Eagle: Any proposals for such development would be assessed against existing planning policy guidance and policies in regional planning guidance and development plans. In particular, local planning authorities would need to assess any proposals along most of the length of the relief road against the policies in planning policy guidance note 2 on green belts. PPG2 maintains the presumption against inappropriate development within green belts and requires very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development.

M25 (Noise Alleviation Measures)

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he proposes to implement the previously proposed noise alleviation measures to the M25 between junctions 12 and 15 independently of the outcome of the review of the proposals for widening the motorway within its existing curtailage between these junctions. [11714]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Phillip Hammond, dated 31 July 1997:

The Minister for Transport in London has asked me to reply to your recent question about noise alleviation measures on the M25 between junctions 12 and 15.

I understand the concerns raised about noise levels by busy roads and it is an issue that the Highways Agency takes very seriously. In this case the previously proposed noise alleviation measures are related to the predicted increase in noise resulting from the widening of M25. These noise reduction measures are an integral part of the widening scheme between junctions 12 and 15 and will not be implemented independently from that scheme.

Minicabs (London)

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will consult over the Government's commitment to regulate London's minicabs; and if he will make a statement. [12270]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have today published a consultation paper on how best to regulate London's minicabs. I have arranged for copies to be deposited in the Library. Comments are invited by 15 September.

I will arrange for the right hon. Member to see the results of the consultation before the Private Hire Vehicles (London) Bill is published.

National Roads Programme

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to publish the study undertaken by his Department into the total and cumulative environmental impact of the national roads programme. [12267]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Under the previous Administration, my Department commissioned the Transport Research laboratory to carry out a feasibility study into this subject. I have now received the study report, copies of which have been placed in the Library. The report highlights a number of practical difficulties about the way in which the total environmental impact can be defined and measured. As recommended, we are now seeking the views of interested statutory bodies and others. We will consider how best to proceed in light of those consultations, taking account of the strategic roads review which my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport announced on 19 June.

Aircraft Safety

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of passenger journeys on airlines covered by "Airworthiness Notice 64" which will take place between 1 June and 30 September this year. [11366]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Airworthiness notice 64 applies to all passenger aircraft on the UK register which have a maximum weight in excess of 5,700 kg or capable of carrying more than 20 passengers. No estimate has been made of the number of passenger journeys which will be carried out by such aircraft this summer.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, (1) pursuant to his answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, columns *493–94*, concerning minimum space for seated passengers, what assessment he has made of the safety risk posed to this portion of the population which falls outside the normal design extremes covered in "Airworthiness Notice 64 (March 1989)"; and if he will make a statement. [11365]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, columns *493–94*, concerning minimum space for seated passengers, if he will update "Airworthiness Notice 64 (March 1989)" to take account of the latest anthropometric data. [11364]

Ms Jackson: It is not practicable for the design criteria for aircraft seats to cover both extremes of body size. The anthropometric range used in airworthiness notice no. 64 represents a practical standard for the design and installation of aircraft seats. There is no reason why an individual who falls outside the anthropometric range used by the Civil Aviation Authority should be at greater risk during an emergency evacuation.

There has been no significant change in the anthropometric data since 1989 and the CAA has no proposals to review this standard.

Central Line (Drivers' Cabs)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what factors underlie the decision to install air conditioning in drivers' cabs on the Central line; what has been the cost *(a)* per cab and *(b)* in total of the installation of air conditioning; and if he will make a statement. [11941]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The scope of investment projects is a matter for London Underground Ltd. However, I understand that air conditioning in drivers' cabs was installed for health and safety reasons, as operators would be subject to excessive temperatures during hot weather—for safety reasons, there are no opening cab windows and it would not be possible to open cab doors in transit. The total cost of installing air conditioning is estimated at £3.5 million or around £20,000 per cab. This is less than 1 per cent. of the total cost of the trains.

Motorway Service Areas

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review guidance to local authorities and planning inspectors on the distance between motorway service areas. [11721]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Policy on the spacing of motorway services areas is set out in roads circular 1/94 which states that they should not generally be less than 15 miles apart. My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to amend that guidance though, in common with other aspects of land use planning and transport policy, it is an area we are keeping under review.

Radioactive Material Transport

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the safety standards for the transport of radioactive material. [11727]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker), *Official Report*, 23 June, columns *381–82*.

Aircraft Movements (Heathrow)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the Cranford agreement on aircraft movements at Heathrow. [11847]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A reconsideration of the Cranford agreement forms one aspect of the further work commissioned in 1995 to assess the capacity and environmental implications of the proposals in the runway capacity enhancement study report. We do not expect the final stage of this work to begin before the autumn.

Bus Transport (Fuel Costs)

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of *(a)* the cost to public transport bus operators resulting from the increase in fuel costs announced in the recent Budget and *(b)* its effect on the cost of travel by bus. [11616]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department estimates that the total cost to bus operators—in England, Scotland and Wales—of the increase in fuel duty announced in the Budget is likely to be about £40 million per year. The effect if any on the fares charged will vary from operator to operator. However, fuel duty is a relatively small part of the total cost of bus operation and the proportion of the duty rebated by my Department to operators of local bus services remains at over 60 per cent.

Roads Expenditure

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list for each of the last five financial years the expenditure on motorways and trunk roads in respect of *(a)* reconstruction, *(b)* overlay, *(c)* resurfacing and *(d)* surface dressing; and what are the forecast outturns for 1997; [11707]

(2) if he will list the bridges carrying motorways and trunks roads which are awaiting strengthening works to comply with the EU plan to permit 40-tonne trucks, indicating the target date for the work to be undertaken; [11709]

(3) if he will list for each of the last five financial years the total lane kilometres of trunk road and motorway subject to *(a)* reconstruction, *(b)* overlay, *(c)* resurfacing and *(d)* surface dressing and what is his forecast for *(a)* to *(d)* for 1997–98; [11708]

(4) which bridges carrying motorways and trunk roads are *(a)* currently and *(b)* expected to be subject to width or weight restrictions. [11710]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I will write to my hon Friend and will place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Highways Agency (Quality of Service Indicators)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Highways Agency will be publishing its quality of service indicators for safety, average journey times and the extent of congestion on trunk roads and motorways. [11706]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The latest information on accidents and casualties on trunk roads and motorways in England is contained in "Road Accident Statistics in English Regions: 1995". Average speeds on the various road classes in the network are in "Traffic Speeds on English Trunk Roads: 1995". Both these documents are published by the Government statistical service. The Highways Agency will be publishing congestion monitoring information later this year. The agency is currently developing a more comprehensive set of indicators for the quality of service on trunk roads.

Traffic Problems (Salisbury)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the terms of reference for his study into alternative solutions to traffic problems in the Salisbury area; when it will *(a)* start and *(b)* finish; and if there will be public consultation. [11839]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The study will be led by the Government office for the south-west, which will seek to agree terms of reference with a wide range of interested parties over the next two months. The time scale for the study will depend on the terms of reference and on the amount of additional information that will need to be collected. It is intended to be an inclusive process and emerging ideas will be shared with the local communities.

Car Accidents (Young Drivers)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many car accidents involved drivers between 17 and 21 years of age in the last year for which figures are available; how many of these resulted in *(a)* personal injury and *(b)* death; and in how many of these accidents the driver was alone. [11790]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In 1996, there were 41,989 injury accidents involving car drivers between 17 and 21 years of age in which there were 718 fatalities and 66,072 casualties. It is not possible to distinguish from reported accident data whether a driver was alone.

London Underground (Safety Measures)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what has been the result of the Health and Safety Executive's monitoring of London Underground's progress in developing *(a)* barriers between adjacent carriages to stop persons falling in the gap between them, *(b)* the provision in the driver's cab of television pictures of the platforms as the train approaches and as it is leaving, *(c)* modifications to the on-train passenger emergency devices so that they stop the train if one is operated as the train leaves a platform but warns the driver thereafter and *(d)* selective provision of platform attendants with an emergency button to stop a train. [11942]

Ms Glenda Jackson: London Underground Ltd. is primarily responsible for safety on the underground, and is either testing or implementing these four measures, which are intended to improve safety on platforms. I understand that the Health and Safety Executive is continuing actively to monitor the way in which London Underground Ltd. is proceeding with each of these measures.

Bradford-Cumbria DBFO Scheme

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much compensation will be paid to each of the four consortiums bidding for the Bradford-Cumbria design, build, finance and operate scheme as a result of the deferment of a decision whether to proceed. [11996]

Ms Glenda Jackson: It will be for the tenderers to submit claims to the Highways Agency with full supporting evidence for the sum they believe due. The agency will process those claims after any necessary clarification with tenderers.

A31 (Pedestrian-cycleway)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what was the cost of constructing the pedestrian-cycleway on the A31 between Ashley Heath and Ringwood; [12253]

(2) what is the estimated cost of signing the pedestrian-cycleway which has been constructed between Ashley Heath and Ringwood; [12254]

(3) when he plans to carry out the signing of the pedestrian-cycleway which has been constructed between Ashley Heath and Ringwood. [12252]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 31 July 1997:

The Minister for Transport in London has asked me to reply to your recent questions about the cost of constructing the pedestrian-cycleway on the A31 between Ashley Heath and Ringwood, the cost of signing the pedestrian-cycleway and when the signing of the pedestrian-cycleway will be carried out.

The cost of constructing the pedestrian-cycleway was £22,000, and the estimated cost of signing approximately £16,000–£18,000. At this stage I am unable to confirm precisely when we will be able to start the signing work, although a bid will be submitted for its inclusion in the Network Enhancement Project budget for implementation in 1998–99. However, I should point out that this scheme will be in competition with other safety improvement schemes on the network, and will also be subject to Hampshire County Council modifying the No Entry Order at West Street to a Prohibited Driving Order with a cycle exemption.

M25 (Widening)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will order a public inquiry into the scheme for a 10 to 12-lane M25 between junctions 12 and 15 as part of the Government's further review of the scheme. [12183]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No. The statutory processes regarding the publish proposals for this scheme were completed when the decision on the environmental impact statement was made.

Bicycles (Lights)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his assessment of the potential safety benefits of fitting lights to all bicycles; what is his policy on the fitting of lights to all bicycles; and what representations he has had from the cycle industry and from groups representing cyclists. [12228]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Under the road vehicles lighting regulations, the fitting and use of lights on pedal cycles is already mandatory between sunset and sunrise.

Since a large proportion of pedal cycles are never used in darkness and would receive no benefit from the fitment of lights, the costs of retrospectively requiring all cycles to have lights fitted would be difficult to justify.

Views expressed by cycling interest groups and the bicycle industry on these issues have been mixed. Those in favour of the fitment of lights to cycles at the point of sale have maintained that the user's choice to subsequently remove them, either permanently or temporarily, should be preserved.

Business Aviation

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement about his policy on business aviation; [12233]

(2) if it is his policy to maintain access for business aviation to the widest possible network of United Kingdom airfields. [12234]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government recognise the importance of business aviation. Guidance to planning authorities on their approach to air transport, including business and general aviation, along with the impact of airports on the environment, will be part of the wide-ranging review of policy leading to the White Paper on integrated transport strategy.

A406 Widening (Compulsory Purchases)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what stage negotiations with the London borough of Enfield has reached regarding compensation for the removal from Pymmes park, N18, of a cedar tree as part of the compulsory purchase of license land relating to the widening of the A406; when these negotiations are expected to be concluded; and if he will make a statement. [12250]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Andrew Love, dated 31 July 1997:

The Minister for Transport in London has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about negotiations with the London Borough of Enfield over the removal of the cedar tree in Pymmes Park.

In April 1996 we wrote to the London Borough of Enfield's Principal Corporate Solicitor, reiterating an offer first made in February 1995 to replace the cedar tree with two mature cedar trees.

This letter also reflected our view that we were not liable for any compensation other than that negotiated with the District Valuer for the land needed for the A406 improvement. I enclose a copy of our letter for your information. To date, we have not received a response from the Council.

Following is the letter:

We spoke last week about your letter of 25 March and I promised to set out our views on this.

Looking back over the papers, I see that we had told you that we expected to take entry into the park before the end of March 1995. We had also written to you on 28 February to say that we could find no way of saving the tree and to offer to provide two replacement trees. That letter also offered a meeting, an offer which received no response.

We wrote to you on 27 April to explain further why we could not save the tree; the offer to provide replacement trees stands, but I do not see that we are liable to provide any compensation other than the negotiated with the District Valuer for the land.

Thames Water (Discharges)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent reports he has received concerning radioactive discharges relating to Thames Water. [9847]

Angela Eagle: All radioactive discharges in England and Wales must be authorised by the Environment Agency under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. Limits for discharges of radioactivity are set by the Environment Agency in accordance with national and international standards, and the potential cumulative effects of discharges are carefully considered. Levels of actual radioactive discharges reported to the Environment Agency are placed on the public registers.

The Environment Agency also monitors levels of radioactivity in the waters and sediments of the River Thames. The results of this monitoring programme demonstrate that levels of radioactivity in the River Thames are low and consistently below World Health Organisation guidelines for drinking water. MAFF undertakes a separate monitoring programme, which includes levels of radioactivity in certain fish, plants and sediments of the River Thames.

Both the Environment Agency and MAFF produce annual reports of their monitoring programmes. Although I received no such report recently, I understand that the next agency report is expected to be issued during the summer, and the next MAFF report, the title of which is "Radioactivity in Food and the Environment" at the end of September.

In addition, information on radioactive discharges from, and levels of radioactivity recorded at, various sites in the UK, including some on the River Thames, is included in the "Digest of Environmental Statistics" No. 19 1997, which was published on 11 July.

I am investigating what information is available on historic discharges into the River Thames from the principle sites involved, and I will write to the hon. Member.

Employment Advertisements

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how often since 1992 his Department or its predecessor Departments have been responsible for employment advertisements which contained age restrictions upon those who could apply. [9511]

Angela Eagle *[pursuant to her reply, 24 July, c. 694]:* Employment advertisements placed by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions have not carried age restrictions for some years. This Department believes that older workers have a great deal to offer in the way of skills and experience and we welcome applications from people irrespective of their age. However, certain advertisements placed by its agencies have reflected age criteria appropriate for specific jobs. A lower age limit of 25 is imposed on the Vehicle Inspectorate's traffic examiners and the Driving Standards Authority's driving examiners. The Coastguard Agency used to recruit watch officers only between the ages of 27 and 50, but this restriction ceased in 1995. In 1996 the planning inspectorate advertised for inspectors who could offer 10 years' service prior to the normal retirement age.

Drinking Water

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to provide guidance to the Office of Water Services on the implementation of legislation to improve the quality of drinking water and the environment as part of the 1999 periodic review of water pricing. [10649]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, together with the Secretary of State for Wales, will issue public guidance in 1998 to the Director General of Water Services on the extent and timing of the water quality and environmental obligations likely to be placed on water and sewerage companies during the review period. In providing this guidance, the Government will draw on advice from the Environment Agency and the drinking water inspectorate on quality requirements, and advice from the Director General of Water Services on the investment likely to be required to meet quality standards and the price implications for customers. It is then for the director general to take account of that guidance in setting price limits in the 1999 periodic review.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, announced an inter-departmental review of the regulation of the utility industries on 30 June, *Official Report*, columns *20–21*. When issuing guidance to the Director General of Water Services, the Government will take into account the conclusions of that review.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the purity of English drinking water by region; and how that compares with the purity of drinking water in other EU countries. [12167]

Angela Eagle: The drinking water inspectorate publishes an annual report on the quality of water supplied by the 29 water companies in England and Wales. The report for 1996 was published on 8 July and is available in the House Library. It confirms that the quality of drinking water in England and Wales remains very high. In excess of 3 million samples were tested in 1996 and of these 99.7 per cent. complied with the standards. Comparable data for the quality of drinking water in other EU member states are not generally available.

Director General of Water Services

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the statutory duties of the Director General of Water Services which relate to the periodic review of water pricing. [10650]

Angela Eagle: Condition B of the instrument of appointment of the water undertakers, made under section 6 of the Water Industry Act 1991, sets out the formula for calculating price limits. It provides for a review of all price limits by the director at 10-yearly intervals, or after five years at the request of the companies of the director.

The Director General of Water Services, under section 2 of the Water Industry Act 1991, must exercise and perform his powers and duties in a manner best calculated to ensure that water and sewerage companies can carry out and finance their functions under that Act, in particular by securing a reasonable rate of return on their capital. Subject to that, he has to protect customers and promote economy and efficiency.

Under section 3 of the Act, the director general, so far as is consistent with his duties under section 2, has general environmental and recreational duties, including a duty to further the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the conservation of flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and a duty to have regard to the preservation of public amenities such as freedom of access to the countryside and seaside.

My right hon. Friend, the President of the Board of Trade, announced an inter-departmental review of the regulation of the utility industries on 30 June, *Official Report*, columns *20–21*. The Government's objective for the review is to set a long-term stable framework for utility regulation which is seen as fair by all the interest groups involved, particularly by consumers

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [11384]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The table sets out total estimated departmental payments—£ million—on computer-related current and capital work for the years requested:

Year	*Current and capital work £ million*
1995–96	55.5
1996–97	55.7
1997–98	64.1
1998–99	62.2
1999–2000	59.3

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to bring forward legislation to create regional development agencies. [11704]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington East (Mr. Kemp) on 24 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *478*.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has in respect of membership of the boards of the proposed regional development agencies; if there will be representation allocated to the co-operative and mutual sector; and if he will make a statement. [12226]

Angela Eagle: On 11 June, the Government launched a wide ranging consultation on our proposals for regional development agencies. We will make our detailed decisions in the light of that consultation

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the boundaries in England for the proposed regional development agencies will be the same as those proposed for regional lists for elections to the European Parliament. [12079]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Office Refurbishment

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for the refurbishment of ministerial offices in his Department; and what is the estimated cost of the works and date of completion. [11873]

Angela Eagle: We have no plans for refurbishment of ministerial offices.

Community Land Schemes

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review community land schemes. [11585]

Mr. Raynsford: If my hon. Friend would let me know those aspects of current arrangements which he believes should be reviewed, I would be pleased to give the matter my careful attention.

Departmental Merger

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the cost to public funds, including the cost of management initiatives, hardware, software and retraining, of changing to common form the differing installations and practices developed by the former Departments of the Environment and of Transport for their internal financial and other information systems, staff records and pay and grading systems. [11944]

Angela Eagle: Final decisions have not yet been taken on the future of all these systems. It is expected that over time the merger will result in overall reductions in the running costs of the new Department.

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions by what proportions and with what direct full-year consequences in annual cost to public funds, the aggregate staff expressed in full-time equivalents of the former Departments of the Environment and of Transport have been reduced in 1995–96 and 1996–97; and what are the estimated figures for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99. [11945]

Angela Eagle: The most recent published information is contained in the respective 1997 annual reports of the former departments of the Environment and of Transport, which show that staff numbers and the associated running costs were as follows:

	1995–96 (outturn)	*1996–97 (estimated)*	*1997–98 (planned)*	*1998–99 (planned)*
Department of Environment				
Aggregate staff (FTE)	4,527	3,846	3,755	3,667
Year on year percentage change	—	–15	–2	–2
Associated running costs (£ million)	226	229	204	198
Year on year percentage change	—	+1	–11	–3
Department of Transport				
Aggregate staff (FTE)	8,532	7,704	7,649	7,550
Year on year percentage change	—	–10	–1	–1
Associated running costs (£ million)	395	401	373	354
Year on year percentage change	—	+2	–7	–5

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was his initial estimate of the cost to public funds of reintegrating the former Departments of the Environment and of Transport. [11882]

Angela Eagle: The estimated costs of the merger are still being prepared. These will depend on decisions regarding the systems to be adopted and the structure of the new Department. It is expected that over time the merger will result in overall reductions to running costs.

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the initial estimate of costs at current prices of separating a Department of Transport from the Department of the Environment in 1976. [11883]

Angela Eagle: At this distance in time the information required to answer the question is no longer available.

Business Rates

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many business organisations and individual businesses he intends to consult in his review of business rates. [11787]

Mr. Raynsford: We shall be consulting the business community as widely as possible. We are currently considering the best way of involving representatives of the business community in the work of the review. Any proposals for change will be the subject of a full public consultation exercise allowing all business organisations and businesses to comment.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many hon. Members have requested meetings with Ministers of his Department since 1 May in relations to issues of compulsory competitive tendering; how many such requests have been refused; and how many remain outstanding as of 24 July. [11221]

Mr. Raynsford: Since 1 May, there have been three requests from hon. Members for meetings with Ministers about compulsory competitive tendering. Two of these requests were declined and the third is under consideration.

Computer (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what funding is presently committed from his departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [11898]

Angela Eagle: To date, committed resources primarily relate to internal staff working in line with CCTA guidance to produce detailed, costed plans by October 1997. These plans will inform decisions on budgetary commitments necessary to meet target dates for corrective work. It is expected that costs will be met from existing public expenditure survey provision.

New Homes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the accuracy of the previous Government's projections for the number of new homes required by 2011; and if he will make a statement. [11595]

Mr. Raynsford: The most recent household projections have been subject to considerable public scrutiny since their publication in March 1995, in particular by the Environment Select Committee in evidence for its report on housing need in 1996. I am satisfied that they were the best that could be made with the available data and that they accurately reflect recent trends.

While generally endorsing the projections, the Committee recommended that the Department continue to examine the extent to which household formation is affected by economic and social factors. This is currently being addressed by the department of applied economics, Cambridge university, as part of a wider research project for the Department on the modelling of the need for social housing. The project has been extended beyond its original completion date and should now be finalised by the autumn.

Last year, the Department also commissioned Heriot-Watt university to undertake a detailed literature review on household formation, with particular emphasis on evaluating the available evidence on the extent to which economic factors affect the propensity for new households to form. This work has recently been completed and the report will be released on Monday, 4 August. Copies will be placed in the House Libraries.

Leisure Development, South Yorkshire

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what decision he has made concerning planning application reference R96/684P for a leisure development at Catcliffe, South Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement. [11600]

Mr. Raynsford: The Secretary of State has been waiting for further information from Rotherham metropolitan borough council. This has recently been received and he expects to make a decision soon on whether or not to call in this application.

Green Ministers

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what decisions Green Ministers took at their meeting, on 30 July. [11881]

Mr. Meacher: At our first meeting, we agreed to establish a programme of work to support the strategic decisions taken by the new Cabinet Committee on the Environment. We considered ways of building sustainable development into policy formulation at the highest level and looked at ways of ensuring that Departments consider sustainable development and the environment in implementing their policies and programmes.

As background to our work, we are today publishing the results of a consultancy study by KPMG that the last Administration commissioned to gauge how far it was meeting its commitment to assess the potential environmental impact of new policy proposals. The study shows that while Departments had begun to take better account of environmental impacts, much more needed to be done to ensure that policies were systematically considered. Copies of the study will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

To address the shortcomings some of the practical measures we are introducing immediately are:

(i) a new sustainable development unit in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to support all Departments and to produce an aide-memoire for policy advisers, reminding them of the need to incorporate environmental considerations into policy appraisals for those policies where environmental impacts might be significant, and setting out the steps that ought to be taken in doing so. It will also provide a central contact point for Departments.

(ii) DETR economists, in consultation with other Departments represented on the Inter Departmental Group on Environmental Costs and Benefits, will provide more technical guidance to those who are frequently involved in

> the environmental aspects of policy appraisal. When available this guidance and the aide-memoirs will replace "Policy Appraisal and the Environment".

We agreed to undertake regular collective reviews of the quality and scope of such assessments.

We also asked officials to consider further targets and policies for ensuring that Departments and their agencies are operated sustainably, for example in energy and water saving, waste minimisation, procurement and staff commuting plans.

We are concerned to keep Parliament and the public informed of progress and issues under debate and will be publicising the outcome of our meetings.

Property Improvement Grants

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the rules governing qualification for an improvement grant where the property is used for both residential and commercial purposes; and what plans he has to change the rules for qualification. [11912]

Mr. Raynsford: Under part I of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 renovation grants are available for the improvement or repair of a dwelling, which is defined as a building or part of a building which is occupied as a separate dwelling. We have no plans to change this provision.

Out-of-town Developments

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to revise planning policy guidance in respect of the development of out-of-town stores. [11921]

Mr. Raynsford: We have no current plans to revise PPG6.

Green-field Sites

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will seek an urgent meeting with the relevant planning authorities in Suffolk in respect of his policy towards releasing more green-field sites for development in Suffolk. [11619]

Mr. Raynsford: No. The Suffolk structure plan makes provision for 54,690 dwellings until 2006 and green-field site specific issues are mostly resolved within the local plans framework introduced by schedule 54a to the Town and Country Planning Act 1991.

Green Belt

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to revise legislation relating to planning guidance in respect of the protection of the green belt. [11712]

Mr. Raynsford: We have no current plans to revise planning policy guidance note 2 which sets out the Government's policy on this issue.

Car Boot Sales

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to restrict the number of days during the calendar year when car boot sales may be held without planning permission; and if he will make a statement regarding permitted development rights in so far as they affect car boot sales. [12240]

Mr. Raynsford: Part 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 grants a general planning permission for the temporary use of land for up to 28 days in any calendar year. However, the general permission for car boot sales is limited to 14 days, in recognition that they may, in some locations, cause problems such as parking, litter and noise. We are considering whether further controls over such markets are necessary.

Population and Household Changes

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of *(a)* population and *(b)* household changes in (i) Birmingham and (ii) Worcestershire over the next 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [12194]

Mr. Raynsford: Population estimates and projections are the responsibility of the Office for National Statistics—formerly the Office for Population Censuses and Surveys. The projections of the numbers of the households, which uses this information are the responsibility of my Department.

Populations and household projections for Worcestershire alone are not available as it was not a separate county at the time the most recent projections were made. The population and household projections over the next 10 years for both the metropolitan district of Birmingham and the county of Hereford and Worcester are as follows:

	1996	*2001*	*2006*
Population[1] (thousands)			
Birmingham	1,008	1,006	1,002
Hereford and Worcester	708	731	751
Households[2] (thousands)			
Birmingham	402	408	416
Hereford and Worcester	285	301	317

Source:

[1] "1993-based Subnational population projections", OPCS Series PP3 number 9,1994.

[2] "Projections of Households in England to 2016", DoE 1995.

Business Start-up Scheme

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many unemployed people have qualified for assistance on the business start-up scheme since its incorporation into the single regeneration budget in each region and for England as a whole; what was the annual expenditure; and which training and enterprise councils have taken part in each year. [12171]

Angela Eagle: Information in the form requested is not available.

The single regeneration budget provides support to local partnerships for schemes which promote the wider regeneration of their chosen area. Under the first two rounds of the challenge fund, 238 schemes have included plans to assist business start ups. Over their lifetime of up to seven years, and subject to satisfactory progress on delivery plans, these schemes stand to receive some £1.7 billion in challenge fund support towards a wide range of economic, environmental and social measures including an estimated 80,000 new business start ups. Training and enterprise councils are involved with the vast majority of the 238 schemes. Further support for new business start ups will also be provided under rounds 3 and 4 of the challenge fund.

Information on the number of new business start ups supported under the challenge fund in 1995–96 and 1996–97 for each of the 10 Government offices for the regions and for England is as follows:

	Number of new business start ups	
Region	*1995–96 (actual)*	*1996–97 (provisional)*
Eastern	440	739
East Midlands	463	943
London	1,858	2,236
Merseyside	577	1,747
North-east	1,740	2,232
North-west	1,283	1,869
South-east	123	375
South-west	571	1,042
West Midlands	1,993	2,476
Yorkshire and Humber	1,410	2,702
England	10,458	16,361

Global Temperatures

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the global average temperature was relative to the 51 to 80 average in *(a)* June and *(b)* the period from January to May. [12243]

Angela Eagle: Climate monitoring carried out at the Met Office's Hadley centre, supported by my Department, shows provisionally that the global average temperature—relative to the 1951–1980 average—was +0.44°C in June 1997 and +0.37°C for the period January to May 1997.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what prediction the Government have made of global average temperature relative to the 51 to 80 average in each month from July to November of this year. [12244]

Angela Eagle: Climate monitoring is carried out at the Met Office's Hadley centre, supported by my Department. However, data for July are not yet completed and the Government make no such predictions of global average temperature.

Regional Boundaries

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make the Local Government Boundary Commission responsible for regional boundaries in England. [12099]

Mr. Caborn: I announced on 11 June that we intend the boundaries of regional development agencies to be the same as the administrative areas of the Government offices for the regions, except that there will be a single agency for the north-west region including Merseyside.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect on the powers and responsibilities in respect of planning and development in their geographical areas of those bodies which straddle borders between Government regions of his proposals in respect of the regions, with particular reference to the Peak District national park. [12110]

Mr. Raynsford: Government offices and the various regional planning bodies already liaise on cross boundary regional planning matters. We envisage that the regional development agencies which we are proposing to set up will be able to cooperate with one another in developing and implementing economic strategies for the regions.

Rural Poverty

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has for the future role of the Rural Development Commission in respect of rural poverty. [12107]

(2) what measures the Government are taking to combat rural poverty; [12108]

Angela Eagle: The Government recognise the special needs of people who live and work in rural areas and of the need to tackle poverty. My Department is responsible for the Rural Development Commission which operates a number of economic and community support programmes, designed to promote regeneration and tackle disadvantage in the countryside. We have been discussing with the Commission its draft 1997 corporate plan which sets out the Commission's future expenditure proposals. The Commission expects to publish its plan later this summer.

We are currently considering how the proposed new regional development agencies might promote economic regeneration in rural areas. We are in the process of consulting interested parties in the regions to hear what they have to say about our proposals.

A number of programmes in my Department and others may impact on rural poverty. The policies and programmes of my Department are being reviewed as part of the comprehensive spending review, in order to consider how far we are meeting the aims of enhancing opportunity, fairness and sustainable development, while promoting employment and investment for sound economic growth.

Local Self-government

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which clauses of the Council of Europe's charter of local self-government the Government plan to sign up to during the ratification stage. [12195]

Mr. Raynsford: These are matters to be decided when, as we intend, we come to ratify the charter. It is the Government's belief, however, that this country's domestic legislation on local government conforms with the charter as a whole.

Council Tax Bandings

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the current council tax bandings with particular reference to mobile home owners who live in properties worth less than the lowest banding threshold. [12021]

Mr. Raynsford: I have asked officials to undertake a review of the council tax. This review will consider, among other things, the current council tax valuation bands.

Water Metering

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what discussions she has had with the water companies concerning the metering of places of worship; [12095]

(2) what discussions he has had with religious leaders regarding the water metering of places of worship; [12096]

(3) what steps he is taking to exempt churches, mosques and temples from the compulsory installation of water meters. [12097]

Angela Eagle: This Government have not taken part in any discussions on the basis of charging places of worship for water and sewerage services. This issue will fall within the scope of the Government review of the system of charging for water announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on 25 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *514*. My Department has written to interested bodies inviting comments and in reply has received representations from religious bodies on the issues raised in the review, including the basis of charging for religious and community premises. The Government will consider all the representations before making proposals on charging. There will then be a period of formal consultation. The Government have made clear their opposition to compulsory metering for essential domestic use.

Gipsy Sites

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will consider, for local authorities that have provided adequate and well-maintained gipsy sites, providing financial assistance for emergency transit sites for other gipsies visiting their area. [11998]

Mr. Raynsford: Exchequer grant at 100 per cent. was available for some 16 years for local authorities to provide both permanent, and transit, gipsy sites with a life of at least 10 years, and for temporary sites with a life of at least three years. Gipsy sites grant was never available for emergency stopping places which are often no more than redundant pieces of land with basic sanitary facilities for short overnight stops. Advice that local authorities should consider providing such sites in their areas, as a means for dealing with short-term unauthorised camping, was first enshrined in departmental circulars issued in 1977 and 1978.

We have no plans at present to reintroduce Exchequer grant aid for local authorities to provide gipsy caravan sites.

Local Government Finance

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ensure that local authorities receive their full management and maintenance allowance for council-owned homes. [11997]

Mr. Raynsford: In calculating each authority's entitlement to housing revenue account subsidy, the allowance made for expenditure on management takes account of a target management and maintenance score determined annually for each authority based on a number of indicators including the characteristics of its stock. Allowances for individual authorities are calculated to move gradually towards the target figures thus ensuring no dramatic changes in subsidy entitlement from one year to the next.

We will be making proposals later this year on HRA subsidy for 1998–99. We shall consult local authorities on the draft HRA subsidy determination in the normal way.

We are considering all aspects of the financing of local authority housing as part of the comprehensive spending review. It will see that taxpayers' money is being spent effectively in order to fulfil the Government's manifesto commitments.

Planning Applications

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many planning applications in England were referred to his Department *(a)* under directions made under the Town and County Planning Acts, *(b)* voluntarily by local planning authorities and *(c)* voluntarily by interested individuals or bodies; and how many applications in each category were in fact called in, in each of the last five years. [12109]

Mr. Raynsford: As I explained in my answer to the hon. Member on 28 July, *Official Report*, column *42*, the information is not available in the form requested.

Bioregional Network Production

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what studies his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into Bioregional Network Production, and what estimate he has made of the number of (i) jobs which would be created and (ii) road miles which would be saved by promoting Bioregional Network Production models. [11993]

Angela Eagle: I will write to the hon. Member.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which local authorities have applied for the special control provisions to deal with problem houses in multiple occupation contained in the Housing Act 1996; and with which local authorities his Department is having discussions about such provisions. [11983]

Mr. Raynsford: A registration scheme for houses in multiple occupation containing special control provisions has been confirmed, under the powers introduced by part II of the Housing Act 1996, for Portsmouth city council and will come into force on 1 September. My Department has held discussions about the possibility of introducing such schemes with two other authorities; Bournemouth borough council and Thanet district council.

Rent Rises

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the real rises in rents for *(a)* council, *(b)* housing association and *(c)* private sector dwellings between 1979 and the latest date available. [12198]

Mr. Raynsford: The average weekly rent for local authority tenants in England increased from £6.49 to £40.05 between 1979–80 and 1996–97, which represents a 135 per cent. increase in real terms after adjusting for inflation as measured by the GDP market price deflator. The closest comparison that can be made for average private sector rents is between 1978 and 1996–97 when rents rose from £6.70 to £76.49, a 263 per cent. increase in real terms. These average private sector rents are estimates from the 1978 private renters survey and the 1996–97 survey of English housing and are subject to sampling variability. No data on overall average housing association rents are available before 1984.

Housebuilding (Birmingham)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to take full account of issues of sustainability in considering the patterns of new housebuilding in and around Birmingham; and if he will make a statement. [12193]

Mr. Raynsford: We are considering advice provided by the west midlands regional forum of local authorities on housing provision in the west midlands region up to the year 2011. They have taken into account national planning policies on sustainability in formulating their advice, and we have those policies very much in mind in considering our response.

Performing Animals

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the health and safety inspection arrangements at travelling zoos and circuses involving performing animals. [12085]

Angela Eagle: Arrangements for inspections of health and safety at travelling zoos and circuses are a matter for local authorities who are the enforcing authority under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 for these types of activity. The Health and Safety Commission has issued guidance to local authorities on enforcement.

Shopping Centres

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish the Government's response to the Environment Committee's report on shopping centres, fourth report, Session 1996–97 HC210; and if he will make a statement. [12317]

Mr. Caborn: The Government have today laid before Parliament their response to the Environment Committee's report on shopping centres which was published in March 1997.

The Government, in responding to the Committee's report, reaffirm the objectives of the current planning policy guidance in PPG6: "Town Centres and Retail Developments". This guidance seeks to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of our existing city, town and district centres. The Government are strongly committed to ensuring that such centres act as the focus for investment, particularly in retail, office, leisure and other appropriate developments, so as to provide easy access to a wide range of facilities and services by a choice of means of transport.

This does not represent a change in Government policy, but rather continues the policies already established. I think that this will be seen as good news by the development industry and by others seeking planning permission, who will welcome the reassurance that continuity of policy provides.

Gas Power

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the Rio 2 treaty on United Kingdom policy towards gas power. [11102]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

The United Nations General Assembly special session on 23 to 27 June 1997 did not result in any treaty commitments. However, in considering applications for gas-fired and other forms of power stations, we will ensure consistency with the wide objectives of secure, diverse and sustainable supplies of energy at competitive prices and meeting environmental targets.

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste within his Department; [11527]

(2) what plans he has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for his Department. [11526]

Angela Eagle: The former Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport set targets, respectively, for a 15 and 20 per cent. reduction in waste from their headquarter buildings by March 1998. An appropriate waste minimisation target and strategy for the new Department is being considered.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by his Department in each of the last five years. [11528]

Angela Eagle: The amount of paper recycled for the Department's headquarters buildings is as follows:

Year	*Total paper recycled in DETR HQ buildings (Tonnes)*
1992–1993	202
1993–1994	220
1994–1995	198
1995–1996	146
1996–1997	119
Total 1992–97	885

HOME DEPARTMENT

Shiji Lapite (Unlawful Killing)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the Metropolitan police intend to take in respect of the unlawful killing of Shiji Lapite; and if he will make a statement. [11283]

Mr. Michael: The matter is now in the hands of the Director of Public Prosecutions to review the decision not to institute criminal proceedings. The Police Complaints Authority will review its decision not to pursue a disciplinary charge in this case, but cannot do so until the outcome of the DPP's review of the papers. The Metropolitan police have undertaken to co-operate fully.

Animal Experimentation

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the report of the National Anti-Vivisection society, "Access Denied", a copy of which has been sent to him. [11280]

Mr. George Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave yesterday to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), *Official Report,* column *258.*

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newark (Ms Jones) of 24 July, *Official Report,* column *681,* if all the animals he lists as being at Huntingdon Life Sciences are currently being used in experiments. [11618]

Mr. Howarth: The figures given in that answer were estimates of the number of animals currently held by the establishment. A large majority of these animals will be undergoing regulated procedures.

Under section 15 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, where a protected animal has been subjected to regulated procedures and where, at the conclusion of the procedures, the animal is suffering or is likely to suffer adverse effects, it must be killed by an approved method.

More precise figures for the number of animals which would need to be killed could be established only at disproportionate cost.

Asylum Seekers

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applicants for asylum before August 1993 are *(a)* awaiting a decision on their application and *(b)* awaiting an appeal hearing against refusal of asylum; [11514]

(2) how many appeals against refusal of asylum, listed by nationality of applicant and by date of application, are awaiting decision; [11513]

(3) how many applications for asylum made to his Department, listed by nationality of applicant and by year of application, are awaiting decision. [11512]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Information on the number of applications awaiting an initial decision in the asylum directorate, as at the end of June 1997, is given in the tables. Of the total, 53.025, it is estimated that 11,300 were applications made prior to August 1993.

As at the end of June 1997, there were approximately 24,000 asylum appeals yet to be determined. I regret that the breakdowns requested, by nationality and year of application, are not available.

Table 1: Asylum applications awaiting an initial decision as at 30 June 1997[1, 2, 3]

	Number
Europe	
Bulgaria	770
Cyprus	585
Poland	640
Romania	570
Former USSR	3,225
Turkey	4,275
Former Yugoslavia	3,275
Others	310
Total	13,645
Americas	
Colombia	2,440
Others	2,300
Total	4,745
Middle East	
Iran	1,110
Iraq	1,085
Lebanon	380
Others	1,140
Total	3,710
Africa	
Algeria	530
Angola	1,220
Cameroon	185
Ethiopia	1,140
Gambia	640
Ghana	2,660
Ivory Coast	455
Kenya	2,170
Liberia	330
Nigeria	3,480
Rwanda	285
Sierra Leone	830
Somalia	690
South Africa	60
Sudan	795
Tanzania	485
Togo	155
Uganda	855

Table 1: Asylum applications awaiting an initial decision as at 30 June 1997[1] [2] [3]

	Number
Zaire	3,165
Zimbabwe	145
Others	555
Total	20,825
Asia	
Afghanistan	685
Bangladesh	1,045
China	1,825
India	1,070
Pakistan	1,825
Sri Lanka	2,740
Others	695
Total	9,890
Other and unknown nationalities	205
Grand total	53,025

[1] Excluding dependents.

[2] Figures rounded to the nearest five.

[3] Takes into account recent revisions to the number of in-country applications lodged in January to May 1997.

Table 2: Asylum applications awaiting an initial decision as at 30 June 1997 by year of application[1]

Year of application	*Percentage*
Pre 1992	5
1992	10
1993	10
1994	20
1995	30
1996	15
1997[2]	10
Total	53,025 (100 per cent.)

[1] Estimates rounded to the nearest 5 per cent.

[2] January to June.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people refused asylum in the United Kingdom since August 1993, listed by year of application, have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been granted leave to remain on (i) exceptional, (ii) marriage and (iii) other grounds. [11502]

Mr. O'Brien: The available information is given in the table.

Number[1] *of persons refused asylum but granted leave to remain in the United Kingdom, August 1993 to June 1997*

Principal applicants

	Year of decision				
	1993 August to December	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*[4] *January to June*
Type of leave granted					
Exceptional leave to remain[2]	790	3,660	4,410	5,050	1,450
Leave to remain as a spouse[3]	50	150	270	330	120
Other leave[3]	10	20	40	40	30

[1] Figures rounded to nearest 10 and exclude dependants.

[2] Relates to those persons granted exceptional leave to remain at the time of being refused asylum.

[3] Relates to those refused asylum seekers subsequently granted leave to remain on non-asylum grounds.

[4] Provisional.

Assaults on Police

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each police force in England and Wales and for each year since 1992 *(a)* the total number of sickness days taken due to assault, *(b)* the average number of days lost per police officer due to assault and *(c)* the total cost to each police force. [11505]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is shown in the table. Information on the total cost of the days lost as a result of assaults on police officers is not held centrally.

Total number of days sick leave due to assault

Forces	*1993*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Avon and Somerset	906	1,106	[1]—	2,090
Bedfordshire	341	247	334	750
Cambridgeshire	400	270	219	377
Cheshire	1,119	221	799	653
City of London	9	145	46	[1]—
Cleveland	1,069	513	392	417
Cumbria	457	271	512	260
Derbyshire	1,502	612	814	756
Devon and Cornwall	712	445	574	920
Dorset	490	492	37	140
Durham	448	602	817	438
Dyfed-Powys	557	251	306	495
Essex	582	469	749	275
Gloucestershire	482	319	149	323
Greater Manchester	1,427	2,413	2,492	1,647
Gwent	342	90	132	669
Hampshire	1,535	537	1,026	[1]—
Hertfordshire	214	218	101	268
Humberside	727	627	458	276
Kent	400	593	302	207
Lancashire	1,160	1,016	1,779	950
Leicestershire	469	992	598	550
Lincolnshire	709	697	719	601
Merseyside	2,825	3,325	3,160	2,229
Metropolitan police	11,323	11,686	5,000	9,723
Norfolk	256	289	[1]—	111
North Wales	61	71	28	450
North Yorkshire	119	76	86	33
Northamptonshire	370	339	69	486
Northumbria	4,048	2,596	2,471	2,453
Nottinghamshire	1,161	700	776	876
South Wales	3,414	2,502	2,455	1,316
South Yorkshire	697	1,040	482	607
Staffordshire	345.50	346	401	483
Suffolk	122	66	75	778
Surrey	240	100	282	216
Sussex	738	798	688	1,050
Thames Valley	668	895	1,073	896
Warwickshire	375	382	379	312
West Mercia	504	398	427	773
West Midlands	2,054.19	2,806	2,165	3,072
West Yorkshire	2,017	1,318	[1]—	2,476
Wiltshire	249	179	259	320
Provincial total	36,320.69	31,302	[2]28,631	[2]31,999
England and Wales total	47,643.69	42,988	[2]33,631	[2]41,506

[1] Information not available.

[2] Incomplete totals.

Average number of days sick leave per assault

Forces	*1993*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Avon and Somerset	10.53	21.69	[1]—	14.72
Bedfordshire	13.12	9.15	9.28	25.86
Cambridgeshire	17.39	15.00	14.60	25.13
Cheshire	19.29	9.61	19.49	13.06
City of London	3.00	24.17	9.20	[1]—

Average number of days sick leave per assault

Forces	*1993*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Cleveland	19.80	17.69	9.80	13.45
Cumbria	19.04	10.42	16.52	10.00
Derbyshire	32.65	14.23	18.93	12.60
Devon and Cornwall	10.79	9.08	13.67	20.00
Dorset	18.85	28.94	4.63	15.56
Durham	13.18	12.29	18.16	18.25
Dyfed-Powys	27.85	10.04	9.00	11.79
Essex	10.39	12.34	14.69	9.82
Gloucestershire	17.21	9.38	13.55	10.09
Greater Manchester	8.49	16.87	22.86	11.60
Gwent	21.38	7.50	11.00	22.30
Hampshire	17.64	13.77	17.10	[1]—
Hertfordshire	9.30	10.38	25.25	14.11
Humberside	12.32	22.39	12.38	8.36
Kent	9.30	11.40	7.55	6.27
Lancashire	12.08	10.92	25.06	12.18
Leicestershire	8.53	15.90	11.73	9.33
Lincolnshire	12.66	18.34	23.19	17.68
Merseyside	20.62	23.58	24.12	22.07
Metropolitan police	12.36	12.21	13.70	23.10
Norfolk	7.11	14.45	[1]—	8.56
North Wales	4.36	5.92	3.50	13.64
North Yorkshire	7.93	10.86	7.82	8.25
Northamptonshire	18.50	26.08	8.63	17.36
Northumbria	21.31	21.11	23.09	20.97
Nottinghamshire	20.73	12.96	14.92	17.88
South Wales	21.88	19.86	25.31	13.29
South Yorkshire	20.50	26.67	11.21	7.78
Staffordshire	9.34	7.36	10.84	14.21
Suffolk	6.78	9.43	5.77	12.75
Surrey	10.43	11.11	16.59	10.29
Sussex	17.57	17.73	21.50	26.25
Thames Valley	22.27	24.86	39.74	22.97
Warwickshire	14.42	13.17	10.83	12.48
West Mercia	14.82	9.71	13.34	12.67
West Midlands	13.97	9.95	13.53	21.04
West Yorkshire	13.36	13.05	[1]—	4.01
Wiltshire	10.83	8.95	17.27	15.24
Provincial total	15.51	15.11	[2]17.44	[2]12.47
England and Wales total	14.62	14.20	[2]16.76	[2]13.98

[1] Information not available.

[2] Incomplete totals.

Average number of days sick leave due to assault per officer

Forces	*1993*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Avon and Somerset	0.3	0.4	[1]—	0.7
Bedfordshire	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.7
Cambridgeshire	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.3
Cheshire	0.6	0.1	0.4	0.3
City of London	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.0
Cleveland	0.7	0.4	0.3	0.3
Cumbria	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.2
Derbyshire	0.8	0.3	0.5	0.4
Devon and Cornwall	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
Dorset	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.1
Durham	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.3
Dyfed-Powys	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.5
Essex	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.1
Gloucestershire	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.3
Greater Manchester	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.2
Gwent	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.5
Hampshire	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.0
Hertfordshire	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2
Humberside	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.1
Kent	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1
Lancashire	0.4	0.3	0.6	0.3
Leicestershire	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.4
Lincolnshire	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5
Merseyside	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.5
Metropolitan police	0.4	0.4	0.2	[1]—
Norfolk	0.2	0.2	[1]—	0.1
North Wales	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.3
North Yorkshire	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0
Northamptonshire	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.4
Northumbria	1.1	0.7	0.7	0.7
Nottinghamshire	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.4
South Wales	1.1	0.8	0.8	[1]—
South Yorkshire	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2
Staffordshire	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Suffolk	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.7
Surrey	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1
Sussex	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.3
Thames Valley	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2
Warwickshire	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3
West Mercia	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4
West Midlands	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4
West Yorkshire	0.4	0.3	[1]—	0.5
Wiltshire	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.3
Provincial total	0.4	0.3	[2]0.3	[2]0.3
England and Wales total	0.4	0.3	[2]0.3	[2]0.4

[1] Information not available.

[2] Incomplete totals.

Police Overtime

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were *(a)* the total and *(b)* the average overtime payments for police officers in each police force in England and Wales for each year since 1992–93. [11506]

Mr. Michael: The following tables show overtime costs, where available, for each police force in years 1992–93 to 1995–96. Figures for 1996–97 are not held centrally. The information for years up to, and including, 1994–95 is taken from the police grant claim forms. The format of this changed in 1995–96, when police authorities were no longer required to submit detailed expenditure information. The figures for 1995–96 are therefore taken from returns submitted by police forces to Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary's matrix of indicators. However, that return also changed in 1996–97, since when information on overtime costs has no longer been available. Nor are details of overtime costs included in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy statistics of actual police expenditure from 1994–95 onwards. The average overtime payment has been calculated by dividing the total cost of overtime for the force by its recorded police strength as at 31 March in the year in question.

Police overtime

	Total cost 1992–93 £	*Average per officer £*	*Total cost 1993–94 £*	*Average per officer £*
Avon and Somerset	6,483,805	2,113	3,411,264	1,125
Bedfordshire	2,465,006	2,110	2,005,596	1,742
Cambridgeshire	3,482,000	2,753	2,452,994	1,942
Cheshire	4,442,473	2,328	2,849,688	1,498
City of London	2,173,705	2,635	2,414,334	2,704
Cleveland	1,645,093	1,113	1,860,389	1,302
Cumbria	2,355,384	1,969	1,772,714	1,510
Derbyshire	3,258,958	1,781	2,606,392	1,432
Devon and Cornwall	6,061,765	2,083	4,308,050	1,478
Dorset	1,729,899	1,329	1,496,308	1,154

Police overtime

	Total cost 1992–93 £	*Average per officer £*	*Total cost 1993–94 £*	*Average per officer £*
Durham	1,670,907	1,210	1,850,700	1,338
Dyfed-Powys	2,142,357	2,215	1,385,499	1,436
Essex	5,628,590	1,917	5,897,104	2,008
Gloucestershire	1,539,963	1,340	1,986,563	1,714
Greater Manchester	24,271,289	3,438	15,174,820	2,178
Gwent	1,553,956	1,548	1,381,970	1,392
Hampshire	7,107,374	2,170	6,577,017	2,011
Hertfordshire	2,324,840	1,368	2,721,585	1,618
Humberside	3,280,068	1,614	3,583,821	1,758
Kent	5,598,524	1,780	6,013,068	1,912
Lancashire	6,967,479	2,173	4,521,393	1,426
Leicestershire	3,875,318	2,147	2,165,623	1,187
Lincolnshire	2,343,488	1,953	2,090,057	1,734
Merseyside	13,660,235	2,926	9,685,750	2,064
Norfolk	3,484,596	2,420	2,926,125	2,022
Northamptonshire	2,804,613	2,339	2,043,539	1,747
Northumbria	10,559,857	2,964	6,289,065	1,748
North Wales	2,351,525	1,729	2,037,388	1,507
North Yorkshire	3,001,970	2,155	2,155,751	1,636
Nottinghamshire	2,582,689	1,110	2,176,532	935
South Wales	5,553,765	1,749	4,840,639	1,546
South Yorkshire	7,415,640	2,446	6,150,043	2,034
Staffordshire	3,716,068	1,705	3,555,875	1,610
Suffolk	2,358,621	1,901	1,937,984	1,604
Surrey	3,244,020	1,916	2,761,499	1,655
Sussex	6,215,486	2,066	4,857,135	1,614
Thames Valley	9,882,241	2,574	9,822,938	2,514
Warwickshire	1,836,204	1,800	1,679,423	1,606
West Mercia	4,261,532	2,075	3,097,475	1,504
West Midlands	11,628,414	1,672	9,948,439	1,418
West Yorkshire	7,933,671	1,575	7,361,286	1,459
Wiltshire	2,387,129	1,887	1,653,739	1,308
Metropolitan	76,857,000	2,900	71,113,000	2,567

Police overtime

	Total cost 1994–95 £	*Average per officer £*	*Total cost 1995–96 £*	*Average per officer £*
Avon and Somerset	2,843,044	948	2,510,903	842
Bedfordshire	1,792,069	1,592	Not available	
Cambridgeshire	2,456,325	1,948	2,277,573	1,840
Cheshire	2,243,278	1,161	2,092,792	1,047
City of London	1,646,861	1,861	1,533,612	1,763
Cleveland	1,664,361	1,157	1,502,665	1,058
Cumbria	1,600,386	1,371	1,395,521	1,252
Derbyshire	2,249,611	1,252	Not available	
Devon and Cornwall	3,326,400	1,156	2,753,740	950
Dorset	1,728,068	1,342	1,498,850	1,187
Durham	1,661,918	1,228	1,584,453	1,131
Dyfed-Powys	1,295,359	1,327	991,485	1,000
Essex	6,216,366	2,128	4,521,694	1,568
Gloucestershire	1,792,109	1,541	1,536,837	1,356
Greater Manchester	21,327,408	3,031	12,320,615	1,776
Gwent	1,340,540	1,345	1,188,953	1,139
Hampshire	7,057,835	2,168	6,792,300	2,029
Hertfordshire	2,727,741	1,602	2,860,029	1,671
Humberside	3,166,817	1,561	3,195,743	1,566
Kent	5,815,810	1,866	4,752,818	1,523
Lancashire	3,315,921	1,032	4,727,719	1,491
Leicestershire	1,803,140	981	Not available	
Lincolnshire	2,352,836	1,962	1,804,428	1,576
Merseyside	8,772,444	1,883	9,308,852	2,110
Norfolk	2,408,259	1,726	2,785,562	1,988
Northamptonshire	2,067,450	1,788	1,940,193	1,683
Northumbria	6,939,486	1,924	4,900,000	1,336
North Wales	2,025,795	1,483	2,323,768	1,686
North Yorkshire	2,042,438	1,571	2,331,828	1,761
Nottinghamshire	2,240,937	966	2,858,904	1,233
South Wales	2,052,738	681	3,121,410	1,031
South Yorkshire	4,370,277	1,438	5,200,856	1,692
Staffordshire	3,098,956	1,389	3,045,884	1,379
Suffolk	1,825,389	1,533	923,590	812
Surrey	3,449,709	2,058	2,397,070	1,458
Sussex	6,020,618	2,054	4,223,529	1,374
Thames Valley	8,395,959	2,179	5,428,446	1,478
Warwickshire	1,466,419	1,448	394,790	403
West Mercia	2,766,917	1,352	1,948,868	966
West Midlands	9,810,619	1,398	9,198,454	1,287
West Yorkshire	6,393,270	1,266	6,722,464	1,307
Wiltshire	1,459,612	1,158	1,168,206	958
Metropolitan	72,537,984	2,640	68,611,322	2,509

1992–93 to 1994–95: police grant claim forms. 1995–96: The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Estimates.

Prisons (Education)

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of prisons and young offender institutions reduced their education provision in 1996–97; and what percentage plan to do so in 1997–98; [11508]

(2) what was the average weekly number of hours spent in education per prisoner in *(a)* June and *(b)* December in (i) 1995, (ii) 1996 and (iii) 1997 to date. [11510]

Ms Quin: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours of education were provided at *(a)* Holloway, *(b)* Highpoint, *(c)* Albany and *(d)* Wandsworth prisons in (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97; and what is the planned number in 1997–98. [11509]

Ms Quin: Hours of education—defined as daytime education, vocational training courses, construction industry training courses and evening education—at these establishments were:

	Hours
Holloway	
1995–96 (actual)	90,200
1996–97 (actual)	87,500
1997–98 (planned)	130,000
Highpoint	
1995–96 (actual)	194,600
1996–97 (actual)	97,000
1997–98 (planned)	313,000

	Hours
Albany	
1995–96 (actual)	100,600
1996–97 (actual)	56,400
1997–98 (planned)	57,000
Wandsworth	
1995–96 (actual)	118,500
1996–97 (actual)	57,400
1997–98 (planned)	38,176

Prisoners (Cells)

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average time per day which prisoners spent in their cells in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* each month since April 1997. [11511]

Ms Quin: The Prison Service monitors the time that is available for prisoners to spend out of their cell, based on normal prison routine, rather than the actual time that prisoners spend in their cell.

The average time available for prisoners to spend out of their cell for 1995–96, 1996–97 and each month since April 1997 was:

1995–96: 11.4 hours

1996–97: 11.2 hours

April 1997: 11.0 hours

May 1997: 11.1 hours

June 1997: 11.0 hours

The data for the current financial year are subject to final validation.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisoners were held in their cells for more than *(a)* 10, *(b)* 12 hours per day in (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) each month since April 1997. [11825]

Ms Quin: The Prison Service monitors the time that is available for prisoners to spend out of their cell, based on normal prison routine, rather than the actual time that prisoners spend in their cell.

The table details the average proportion of prisoners held in prisons where the average time available for prisoners to spend out of their cell was *(a)* more than 10 hours and *(b)* more than 12 hours.

Percentage of prisoners unlocking for:	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*April 1997*	*May 1997*	*June 1997*
More than ten hours	70	63	57	59	60
More than twelve hours	28	24	23	22	20

The data for the current financial year are subject to final validation.

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average daily time spent out of cells by prisoners in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* each month since April 1997. [11952]

Ms Quin: The Prison Service monitors the time that is available for prisoners to spend out of their cell, based on normal prison routines, rather than the actual time that prisoners spend out of their cell.

The average time available for prisoners to spend out of their cell for 1995–96, 1996–97 and each month since April 1997 was:

1995–96: 11.4 hours

1996–97: 11.2 hours

April 1997: 11.0 hours

May 1997: 11.1 hours

June 1997: 11.0 hours

The data for the current financial year are subject to final validation.

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisoners were out of their cells for *(a)* more than 10 hours per day and *(b)* more than 12 hours per day in (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97. [11951]

Ms Quin: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Sir Peter Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are currently accommodated two to a cell designed for one person. [12222]

Ms Quin: I will write to the right hon. Member.

Prisoners (Constructive Activity)

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average weekly number of hours spent in constructive activity by *(a)* all prisoners, *(b)* remand prisoners and *(c)* sentenced prisoners in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97 and (iii) each month since April 1997 (1) nationally and (2) in each London prison. [11950]

Ms Quin: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Republican Prisoners (Transfers)

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many republican prisoners have submitted applications to be transferred from his jurisdiction to penal institutions in the Republic of Ireland; what is the average length of time for such an application to be processed; and if he will make a statement; [11084]

(2) what plans he has to authorise the transfer of republican prisoners to penal institutions in the Republic of Ireland under the European convention on the transfer of sentenced prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [11083]

Ms Quin *[holding answers 30 July 1997]:* Any prisoner may apply for repatriation to the Republic of Ireland. All such applications are considered under the terms of the convention and, in accordance with this country's long-standing policy, which is normally not to repatriate prisoners where there would likely to be a substantial reduction in time to serve as a result.

To date, 24 prisoners convicted of terrorist-related offences and held in prisons in England and Wales have applied to be repatriated to the Republic of Ireland.

Of eight such applications which have been resolved to date, six were processed in an average period of a little over 10 months from date of application for repatriation to date of final decision; two were withdrawn by the prisoners concerned 19 months after date of first application.

The date of application is taken as being either the date on which the prisoner submitted the request, or 1 November 1995—the date on which the Republic brought the convention into force there—whichever is the later.

Cardiff Prison (Disciplinary Hearings)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of disciplinary hearings instituted at Cardiff prison following the death of Geoffrey Thomas. [11938]

Ms Quin: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 24 July *Official Report*, column *683*. It has come to my attention that dates given in my previous answer were incorrect, for which I apologise.

Disciplinary proceedings were instituted against five members of staff at Cardiff prison following the death of Mr. Geoffrey Thomas. Three of the cases have been concluded. Proceedings against two others have been adjourned at the request of the Prison Governors Association.

The first hearing took place on 21 and 22 May, and not 19 May as previously stated. The adjournment of two cases took place on 23 May and not 22 May.

The Prison Governors Association has questioned the impartiality of the governor hearing the case, and not the legality of the actions of the governor investigating the incident, as stated in my previous answer.

Hearings will be reconvened at the earliest available date.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcom Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding is presently committed from his departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [11890]

Mr. Straw: Each business area within the Home Office is responsible for ensuring that computer systems in their area are year 2000 compliant. The Department is following guidance published by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency. The business areas are currently preparing costed plans for this work and these plans should be completed by end of October this year, which is the target date recommended by the central information technology unit. Until these costed plans are available, it is not possible to estimate the cost of year 2000 remedial work and at this stage no funds are committed. The business areas are aware that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said that costs will have to be met from existing public expenditure survey provision.

Prisoners (Mental Disorder)

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what access to the NHS is available to mentally disordered prisoners; what information is collated by the Prison Service about mentally disordered prisoners' medical history; what information is passed on to the NHS after release; and if he will make a statement. [11910]

Ms Quin: Prisoners who are mentally disordered in accordance with the criteria in the Mental Health Act 1983 for detention as in-patients for medical treatment can be transferred to psychiatric hospital. Prisoners with mental health problems who do not meet those criteria receive care and treatment in prison, often under the supervision of a qualified psychiatrist as occurs in the community.

On their first reception into prison, all prisoners receive a physical and mental health examination which includes a psychiatric history. Prison staff may, with the prisoner's agreement, request individual records or other medical reports from the national health service in cases where that is considered necessary.

Where there is a need for continuing treatment after release, medical information is transferred from the prison doctor to the prisoner's general practitioner or other responsible agency in the community. Where a prisoner does not consent to such disclosure, but his or her mental ill health places them or others in the community at significant risk, such information would be disclosed to an appropriate person or agency and the prisoner informed accordingly. The Prison Service plans to issue a new health care standard on "Continuity of Health Care" which will give additional advice to establishments on exchanges of information about health care matters between the Prison Service and other agencies.

Primary Purpose Rule

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in implementing changes in the primary purpose rule. [11919]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend announced the abolition of the primary purpose rule in an answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 5 June, *Official Report*, column *218*. An amendment to the immigration rules was laid which came into effect the same day. Outstanding appeals involving primary purpose are being reviewed. In cases where the refusal was on the ground of primary purpose alone, instructions are being issued to grant entry clearance.

Prisons (Security)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the Government policy towards the outstanding recommendations made in the Learmont report into prison security. [11932]

Ms Quin: One hundred and twelve of the recommendations have been implemented. Of the remaining 15, 11 are the subject of a cost-benefit analysis to determine their operational effectiveness and value for money, and four are still being reviewed or evaluated through pilot schemes.

Volunteers (Screening)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made with the proposal in the Cullen report for the screening of volunteers; and if he will make a statement. [11598]

Mr. Michael: The recommendation for the vetting and supervision of adults working with children and young people, including paid workers and volunteers, is under consideration by the Government.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to introduce a legal obligation on individuals and organisations to have all their *(a)* existing and *(b)* new volunteers screened; and what estimate he has made of the average cost of that procedure. [11599]

Mr. Michael: There is no legal requirement for individuals or organisations to screen existing or new volunteers. Depending on the level of check, the cost of such checks has been estimated at between £5 and £10. We are currently considering the implementation of part V of the Police Act 1997 and will honour an undertaking to consult voluntary organisations before reaching a decision.

Sutton Police Station

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to bring forward the date of the private finance initiative for building a new police station in Sutton. [11830]

Mr. Michael: The Metropolitan police propose to seek tenders for provision of services for a package which includes replacement of divisional police stations in Sutton, Bromley and Lewisham.

The receiver for the Metropolitan police district hopes to advertise for expressions of interest in the Official Journal of the European Communities by September.

European Union

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on justice and home affairs matters currently under discussion within the European Union. [11922]

Ms Quin: In securing its major policy objectives in the Amsterdam treaty, the Government ensured that the United Kingdom would continue to play a leading role in European Union co-operation to fight crime, drugs and terrorism.

During its current presidency of the European Union, Luxembourg proposes to give priority to the implementation of the Dublin convention on asylum; to undertake further work on a draft Eurodac convention; and to work towards further measures to tackle illegal immigration. Attention will also be given to issues relating to the implementation of the Europol convention; work to counter a range of organised criminal activities; and aspects of the illegal production and trafficking of drugs.

In general, Luxembourg's work programme has a strong practical emphasis, which the Government welcome, and on which we intend to build during the United Kingdom presidency in 1998.

A full explanatory note on Luxembourg's proposed work programmes was made available for parliamentary scrutiny earlier this month under explanatory note reference 9378/97.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has, pursuant to article K.2 of the Amsterdam treaty for *(a)* operational co-operation of law enforcement bodies, *(b)* training and secondment of staff, *(c)* shared use of equipment and forensics and *(d)* common evaluation of investigative techniques. [11402]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* Support for operational co-operation, training and secondments, equipment and forensic science, and relevant investigative techniques are all matters which are already discussed under title VI of the present treaty on European Union. It is for future consideration exactly how they will be taken forward when the Amsterdam treaty is in force, but this will not require radical changes.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what operational guidelines will be issued on the protection of personal data while law enforcement bodies operate under article K.2 of the Amsterdam treaty. [11403]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* We have no current plans to issue guidelines of this sort. The law enforcement agencies of member states will continue to operate in accordance with national law. The Europol convention already contains data protection provisions relating to Europol, and data protection issues will be considered fully in the development of any new initiatives at European Union level.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on *(a)* the independent operational capacity of Europol following the Amsterdam treaty and *(b)* Europol's proposed research, documentation and statistical network on cross-border crime. [11404]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* Article K.2 of the Amsterdam treaty sets out the future role of Europol in supporting operational activity by law enforcement agencies of member states. Europol will have no independent operational capacity. The reference to a research documentation and statistical network is consistent with the tasks already set out in the Europol convention. It will be for consideration, once the Amsterdam treaty and the Europol convention have been ratified, whether Europol's role in this area should be developed further.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the asylum protocol of the Amsterdam treaty on the formulation of *(a)* a common asylum policy and *(b)* a common asylum system for the European Union. [11411]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* The asylum protocol of the draft Amsterdam treaty concerns the handling of claims for asylum from nationals of European Union member states in other member states. As such, it will apply to a relatively small number of cases.

The position of the United Kingdom in relation to other measures which might be adopted under the new title in the treaty of the European Communities concerning free movement of persons, asylum and immigration, is guaranteed by protocol Y of the draft Amsterdam treaty. This provides that such measures shall not be binding on or applicable in the United Kingdom and Ireland unless either or both states wish to take part.

Probation Service

Ms Beverely Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisons and young offender institutions reduced their number of probation staff in the financial year 1996–97. [11635]

Ms Quin: Thirty-eight per cent. of the total number of establishments in use during 1996–97 reduced their numbers of seconded probation staff. In some, the reduction was in terms of the number of hours worked by probation staff, rather than full-time posts. Some establishments have increased their numbers of probation staff since the beginning of the current financial year.

Ms Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many seconded probation officers there were in (i) June 1995, (ii) January 1996, (iii) June 1996, (iv) January 1997 and (v) June 1997; and what is the estimated national number in 1999; and nationally in *(a)* Manchester, *(b)* Leeds, *(c)* Birmingham and *(d)* each of the six London prisons. [11636]

Ms Quin: The numbers of probation officers working in prisons on 30 June and 31 December each year from 1995 to 31 December 1996, the latest date for which figures are as yet available, are as follows:

Seconded probation officers working in prisons (whole-time equivalents)

	Number
30 June 1995	645
31 December 1995	639
30 June 1996	586
31 December 1996	543

Information on probation officers seconded to individual prisons is not held centrally, but I will write as soon as possible to my hon. Friend with the details she requests.

The number of probation officers seconded to the Prison Service in future years will depend on the outcome of the comprehensive spending review and of discussions between governors and chief probation officers about what staff in what grades can most efficiently meet the services' joint responsibilities to provide good through care under the national through care framework published in 1993, a copy of which is in the Library.

Restorative Justice

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is his Department's policy towards restorative justice; and what guidance is given to *(a)* police forces and *(b)* magistrates on the operation of restorative justice; [11834]

(2) what plans he has to review the operation of restorative justice in United Kingdom police forces. [11833]

Mr. Michael: I have recently met representatives of the National Council for Social Concern to discuss their proposals to promote restorative justice in England and Wales. Our long-standing commitment to introduce a reparation order demonstrates the Government's wish to restore a proper balance of rights and responsibilities which will be taken forward in the Crime and Disorder Bill later this year. The concept of "restorative justice", like the concept of "relational justice" developed by the Jubilee centre in Cambridge, provide useful tools for understanding crime and disorder when combined with a careful analysis of local problems and an objective assessment of "what works".

Immigration

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what conditions a foreign national who has married a resident of the United Kingdom, in the United Kingdom, may have the unlimited right to remain in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [11905]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A person who enters the United Kingdom with an entry clearance for the purpose of marriage, or who is in the United Kingdom for a purpose other than marriage and subsequently marries a British citizen or a person settled here, may be granted an initial probationary period of 12 months leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom provided that person meets the requirements of the immigration rules. On completion of the 12-month probationary period, they may be granted indefinite leave to remain provided the marriage still subsists and the other requirements of the immigration rules are met.

Prison Staff (Early Retirement and Severance)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison staff members have accepted offers of early retirement or severance under the voluntary early retirement and severance scheme. [11837]

Ms Quin: One thousand, one hundred and thirty-four members of staff accepted offers of early retirement or severance under the Prison Service voluntary early retirement and severance scheme.

Caution Plus

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the operation of caution plus by the Thames Valley police force; and what plans he has to encourage other forces to adopt caution plus. [11782]

Mr. Michael: The operation of caution plus schemes in a number of areas has demonstrated the value of early, positive intervention with young offenders. I have been impressed by a number of initiatives such as the retail theft initiative in Milton Keynes which show the value of the police working with local authorities and the community—including the business community—to tackle crime and to "nip things in the bud".

We are studying "best practice" in the Thames Valley and elsewhere in working towards implementation of our proposed final warning for young offenders and the intervention which will be associated with it. Our first consideration is how best to see "what works" in order to prevent crime and reduce reoffending.

Political Parties

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards the state funding of political parties. [11649]

Mr. George Howarth: We have no plans to introduce state funding of political parties.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on the disclosure by political parties of their financiers and donations. [11648]

Mr. Howarth: We are committed to obliging parties to declare the source of all donations above a minimum figure.

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the compulsory registration by political parties of their membership. [11650]

Mr. Howarth: We have no plans to introduce compulsory registration by political parties of their membership.

Programme Development Unit

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the objectives of the Home Office programme development unit; what performance indicators will be used to monitor its work; and if he will make a statement. [11914]

Mr. Michael: The primary objective of the Home Office programme development unit is to contribute to the development of policy and practice in the area of crime and criminal justice through experimental initiatives from which general lessons can be drawn. It identifies, initiates, encourages, develops and manages innovative local projects to test out in practice ideas stemming from research and practice. It ensures projects are properly monitored and independently evaluated and disseminates the results. It offers help with the replication of similar programmes where appropriate.

The work of the programme development unit is assessed by the contribution that its work makes to informing policy and practice; the extent to which projects found to be successful are continued beyond the period of Home Office funding, either through attracting funding from other sources or through being mainstreamed into the activities of other bodies such as local authorities; and the extent to which they are replicated.

The work of the programme development unit is regarded as an essential component in the armoury to tackle and prevent crime.

European Convention on Human Rights

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 21 July, *Official Report*, column *385*, if he will list those who responded to the consultation document "Bringing Rights Home", published in December 1996; and what further discussions on the incorporation of the European convention on human rights have been held since. [11937]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We received responses to "Bringing Rights Home" from the following persons and organisations:

Charter 88
Churches Commission for Racial Justice
Data Protection Registrar
Director of Human Rights, Council of Europe
Martin Doherty
Editor of the "European Human Rights Law Review"
Avril Fox
Guild of Editors
Sir Basil Hall
Human Rights Incorporation Project
Institute for Public Policy Research
Joseph Jaconelli
Justice
Martin Kenny
Law Society
David Lepper
Liberty
Karen Maloney
Frank McManus
Councillor N. Perrott
Public Law Project
Royal National Institute for Deaf People
Rabinder Singh
Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights
Dr. Robert Wintemute
Enid Wistrich.

Home Office Ministers have had meetings to discuss incorporation of the convention with Charter 88, the Human Rights Incorporation Project, the Institute for Public Policy Research, Sir Kenneth Keith, Liberty, my noble Friend the Lord Lester of Herne Hill and Justice.

Country Watch

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the success of schemes of policing for rural areas with particular reference to country watch. [11785]

Mr. Michael: The Government recognise that the most effective response to rural crime is a partnership between the police and the local community, but no specific assessment has been made of country watch. We encourage crime prevention schemes that enable members of the public—with the support of the local police—to do something positive in the fight against crime.

In accordance with this, we intend to introduce new statutory duties for local authorities and the police to work together and with the local community to analyse and identify local problems of crime and disorder and then together to draw up and implement strategies for tackling such problems. That will apply in both rural and urban areas.

Schemes like country watch will continue to play a role in this partnership. The support which such schemes attract from the local community can make a significant impact on crime in the countryside.

Special Constabulary

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to issue the consultation paper on compensation arrangements for special constables; who is being consulted; what is the deadline for consultation; and when he plans to bring forward legislation. [11724]

Mr. Michael: We intend to issue the consultation paper in September, and shall invite the police representative bodies, the Local Government Association, and the working group on the special constabulary to submit comments by the end of October. Subject to these consultations, our aim is to introduce these new arrangements as part of a revised and consolidated set of regulations for special constables, to be made next year under the Police Act 1996.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables there have been in post in each year since 1979. [11354]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The number of special constables in post in England and Wales since 1979 are given in the table.

Year	*Number*
1979	15,960
1980	15,108
1981	14,978
1982	15,160
1983	15,331
1984	16,012
1985	16,161
1986	16,070
1987	16,209
1988	15,788
1989	15,589
1990	15,881
1991	18,073
1992	19,243
1993	20,566
1994	20,096
1995	20,026
1996	19,736
1997[1]	19,836

[1] The figure for 1997 is provisional. The figures from 1979 to 1994 were recorded as at 31 December of those years. From 1995, the figures were recorded as at 31 March.

Prisons (Staff)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the ratio of prison staff to prisoners in each year from 1993 to 1997. [11838]

Ms Quin: The information requested is listed.

Year	*Staff: prisoner ratio*
1993	1:1.17
1994	1:1.24
1995	1:1.26
1996	1:1.33
1997[1]	1:1.50

[1] Figures as at 30 June 1997.

Perjury

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons found guilty of perjury since 1979 served custodial sentences in an open prison; and what percentage this represents of the total. [10010]

Ms Quin: The information available centrally combines the offences of perjury, libel and perverting the course of justice. Information for 1991 to 1996 is contained in the table. From court proceedings statistics for the years 1991 to 1995, it is known that around one in nine of these offenders will have served sentences for perjury. It is not possible to provide the information in this form prior to 1991 as information held centrally before that date combined perjury with a much larger group of offences.

Prisoners released from open prisons having served a custodial sentence for perjury, libel, or perverting the course of justice

Year	*Number of discharges*	*Percentage of all discharges from open prisons*	*Percentage of all discharges from all prisons*	*Percentage of all discharges for perjury, libel, and perverting the course of justice*
1991	40	0.5	0.1	30.5
1992	66	1.0	0.2	34.7
1993	59	0.7	0.1	26.1
1994	76	1.0	0.1	24.5
1995	102	1.1	0.2	21.2
1996	156	1.4	0.2	27.8

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average length of time spent in prison by prisoners who were released in each year since 1992 having served a custodial sentence for perjury. [10009]

Ms Quin: The information available centrally combines the offences of perjury, libel and perverting the course of justice. The available information is contained in the table.

In the information held centrally about prisoners, the offence of perjury cannot be separately distinguished from among this group of offences. From court proceedings statistics for the years 1992 to 1995, it is known that around one in nine offenders given custodial sentences for perjury, libel or perverting the course of justice were guilty of the offence of perjury.

Average length of time served for prisoners released, having served a custodial sentence for perjury, libel, or perverting the course of justice.

	Average time served (months)
1992	3.7
1993	4.3
1994	3.8
1995	3.5
1996	3.6

Operation Quantum

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the *(a)* cost and *(b)* number of consultants hired to advise Operation Quantum. [10099]

Ms Quin: Since the inception of the project in April 1996, seven consultancy firms have been employed by the Prison Service to provide specialist advice on legal issues, corporate finance, procurement procedures and specification processes. The need for consultants has been steadily reduced as skills transfer into the service has taken place. The service now retains four consultancy firms.

To date, the Prison Service has spent £2.5 million on consultancy fees. The costs of the whole procurement process, including consultancy fees, are expected to be recovered from the net savings generated by implementation of the project.

Prisoners (Diet and Behaviour)

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department commissioned *(a)* before and *(b)* after 1 May to consider the effect of diet on prisoners' behaviour. [11936]

Ms Quin: The Prison Service has not commissioned such research. However, as previously stated to the hon. Member, it has agreed to facilitate the nutritional rehabilitation project being run by Natural Justice Ltd. in Aylesbury young offender institution which started in 1996. This is expected to finish this year.

Police Scientific Development Branch

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which scientific journals and other publications staff from the police scientific development branch, Sandridge, have published papers since 1990; and if he will list the date of publication in each case. [11963]

Mr. Michael: A list is being compiled in order to be able to respond fully to the hon. Member.

As soon as the list is complete, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the *(a)* published and *(b)* internal reports the police scientific development branch, Sandridge, produces outlining its activities. [11966]

Mr. Michael: The information is as follows:

(a) Published reports

There are a number of published reports which outline the police scientific development branch activities:

(i) Home Office annual report

(ii) Home Office memorandum on the prior options review of PSDB—1997, in the Library;

(iii) Technical papers included in conference proceedings—both in the United Kingdom and overseas;

(iv) Technical papers in scientific and technical publications;

(v) Office of Science and Technology forward look of Government-funded science, engineering and technology;

(vi) Annual review of government research and development.

(b) Internal reports

PSDB internal reports, which are sent out to specific customer contacts include:

(i) two-page PSDB overview, by director PSDB;

(ii) PSDB annual report;

(iii) PSDB technical reports and standards.

Departmental Savings

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the savings planned in his departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 in order to allow for the higher than planned expenditure on the Prison Service announced in his statement of 24 July; and if he will make a statement. [11518]

Mr. Straw: It is too early for me to be able to identify the savings in the Home Office budget which might cover the extra spending on the Prison Service. For both 1997–98 and 1998–99, I will be looking rigorously at my whole programme to find offsetting savings. I expect this process to take several months.

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by his Department in each of the last five years. [11543]

Mr. Straw: The Home Office takes its responsibilities to the environment seriously and increasingly participates in local paper recycling schemes. For example, the Department has been operating the Westminster city council's "Green Bin" scheme very successfully for almost two years in its central London headquarters buildings. However, no central record is kept of the amount of paper utilised or recycled.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for his Department. [11541]

Mr. Straw: The Home Office is committed to seeking improvements to its green housekeeping and is currently revising its energy and environmental strategy and will address waste minimisation as part of this. A draft of the new strategy and accompanying guidance material will be discussed at a property managers seminar to be held on 15 September. The expectation is that the new strategy will be adopted as Home Office policy and receive its official launch by the end of the year.

In the meantime, the current Home Office green housekeeping strategy, published in August 1993, requires that property managers carry out an annual audit against environmental objectives which include waste minimisation. Specific reference is made to the continued need for attention to the efficient use of all resources, to the effective and economic use of paper and to extending the recycling of other departmental waste, such as glass, plastics, cans and batteries. The Department has also promulgated all the central guidance on waste minimisation and can claim considerable success with its recycling of paper, bottles and toner cartridges and most recently with reuse of its computers and printers.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste in his Department. [11542]

Mr. Straw: My Department is strongly committed to minimising waste. In encouraging its local property managers to make the most effective use of the limited effort they are able to devote to green housekeeping, the Home Office has sought their full co-operation with local and central environmental initiatives for improving waste management in preference to their administering the setting up and monitoring of specific waste minimisation targets. Once a year, the local property managers are asked to report progress against their action plans under the terms of the 1993 Home Office green housekeeping strategy. The Department is in the process of revising its energy and environmental strategy and, in line with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' recommendations, will be giving due consideration to the appropriateness of future waste minimisation targets.

Office Refurbishment

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the refurbishment of ministerial offices in his Department; and what is the estimated cost of the works and date of completion. [11874]

Mr. Straw: I have no current firm plans for the refurbishment of ministerial offices, but decoration and window glazing work estimated at £8,500 may be carried out later this year.

Firearms Consultative Committee

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the names of the new members of the Firearms Consultative Committee. [11943]

Mr. Michael: There have been three new members since the committee last reported in July 1996.

They are:

Mr. J. D. Hoare: Secretary of the National Small-bore Rifle Association

Mr. B. Hughes: Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. V. Clayton: Home Office

Wormwood Scrubs Prison

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when repairs to the roof at Wormwood Scrubs will be completed. [11953]

Ms Quin: A bid has been made for repairs to be carried out to the roof at Wormwood Scrubs in the financial year 1998–99.

UK Passport Agency

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the development of the UK Passport Agency. [11586]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have recently approved the UK Passport Agency's plans for the introduction of a new, more secure British passport from the end of next year. The agency has awarded two contracts under the public-private partnership arrangements to the private sector. Siemens Business Services will undertake the receipt of passport applications, and the collection, storage and transmission of the data needed or the new passport. The Stationery Office Ltd. will undertake the printing and issuing of the new passport. The enhanced security features will include digitised photographs and signatures.

The UK Passport Agency is not being privatised. It will retain its core function of establishing eligibility for a British passport, and will continue to operate from its six existing regional offices. There will be a reduction in the agency's staffing, but there should be no need for compulsory redundancies for permanent staff.

Traffic Wardens

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will extend the powers of traffic wardens to the enforcement of a range of moving traffic offences; and if he will make a statement. [11228]

Mr. Michael: The Department is keen to encourage the police service to make the most efficient use of its traffic warden resources.

There are no plans at present to extend the functions of traffic wardens, but we are considering a proposal from the Association of Chief Police Officers that wardens should be given the power to stop vehicles so that they can assist the Vehicle Inspectorate and other enforcement agencies with the conduct of road checks.

Special Secure Units

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prisons which contain special secure units; how many places are available in each; and what is the annual cost of maintaining *(a)* a prisoner in a special secure unit and *(b)* a category A prisoner. [11105]

Ms Quin: Those prisons which are equipped with special secure units and the places available in each are as follows: Belmarsh, 48 places; Full Sutton, eight places; and Whitemoor, 14 places. There are currently 40 prisoners held in special secure units.

The average cost per prisoner place in a special secure unit is estimated to be approximately £61,000 per annum[1]. Convicted category A prisoners are held in one of five dispersal prisons. The average cost per prisoner place in a dispersal prison is £33,000 per annum[1].

[1] Costs are based on figures obtained for the financial year ending 31 March 1997 and represent the cost per accommodation place certified to hold prisoners in an establishment.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 19 June, *Official Report,* column *247,* what plans he has to fund new CCTV projects in 1998–99; what plans he has to extend the CCTV challenge competition; when new bids for CCTV will be considered; and if he will make a statement. [12232]

Mr. Michael: As I indicated in my reply to a question from the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) on 19 June, *Official Report,* column *247,* we are considering whether there should be another round of the closed circuit television challenge competition in 1998–99 as part of our review of spending programmes. An announcement will be made later in the summer.

Sentencing

Sir Peter Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the average length of prison sentence passed on adult males by Crown courts in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* 1996 for (i) violent offences, (ii) sexual offences, (iii) burglary, (iv) robbery, (v) theft and handling, (vi) drugs offences and (vii) motoring offences; [12224]

(2) what proportion of offenders sentenced for indictable offences were sentenced to custody *(a)* at all courts, *(b)* at Crown courts and *(c)* in magistrates courts, in each year from 1992 to 1996 and in each month of 1997. [12223]

Mr. Michael: The information is published in the Home Office statistical bulletin issue 16/97 "Cautions, Court Proceedings and Sentencing England and Wales 1996". This was published on 16 July 1997 and tables 9 and 7 refer.

The 1996 data are "estimated", with final figures becoming available in the autumn. 1997 data will not be available until mid-1998.

Copies of the bulletin are available in the Library.

Immigration Detainees (Medical Services)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what revised specification for provision of medical services has been prepared for immigration detainees in Campsfield house; and if he will make a statement. [12007]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Earlier this year, advice was sought from the director of public health in the Oxfordshire health authority in preparing a revised specification for the provision of medical services at Campsfield house. This included enhanced attendance by a doctor, additional nursing staff, including the appointment of a registered mental nurse, stress management clinics, and the availability of a female doctor for those detainees who specifically requested one. Effecting these enhancements commenced on 15 January and they were fully in place by 1 March 1997.

I am assured that the health services at Campsfied house are comparable with those provided for Oxfordshire residents by a general practitioner. A detainee who wishes to see a specialist will, if the medical circumstances of his case warrant it, be referred to a specialist and any such decision will be taken by the doctor treating him.

CS Gas

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evaluation of the medical effects of the CS gas solvent, methyl isobutyl ketone, has been made by officials of his Department and the police scientific development branch since 1990; how many published or internal reports have been written by his Department on this subject since 1990; and how many of these reports are currently unclassified. [12180]

Mr. Michael: The Home Office police scientific development branch, together with the Department of Health and the Ministry of Defence, fully evaluated all scientific data relating to methyl isobutyl ketone, MIBK, before police trials of CS spray canisters containing this solvent were conducted last year. The Home Office has not produced any reports, either internally or published, about MIBK.

The ideal solvent for use in CS spray will present no risk to health—in particular, the eyes—and will evaporate as soon as it has done the job of delivering the CS irritant to the target. I am told that MIBK is the solvent which comes closest to achieving this. It occurs naturally in oranges, grapes and vinegar. It has many applications, including use as a food additive. It has been used in CS sprays in France for many years without serious difficulty: in particular, extensive research there has shown that it has a low toxicity to the eyes. Its only drawback is that it has a relatively low volatility, which means that it remains on the skin of someone sprayed for a short time before evaporating and may cause de-fatting and blistering.

Regional Boundaries

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a boundary commission responsible for regional boundaries in England. [12098]

Mr. George Howarth: It is our intention that the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England should be given the responsibility of making recommendations as to the regional boundaries to be used in England for the 1999 elections to the European Parliament.

Highgrove (Policing)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by whom the cost of policing in and around Highgrove, Tetbury, on Friday 18 July was met; and if he will make a statement. [12231]

Mr. Michael: The cost of policing in and around Highgrove on 18 July was met by Gloucestershire constabulary in the normal way.

Prisons (Unit Costs)

Sir Peter Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the percentage change in prisons unit costs between 1995–96 and 1996–97; and what is the planned percentage reduction in each of the next three years. [12221]

Ms Quin: The unit cost used by the Prison Service is net current expenditure per uncrowded prisoner place—the total certified normal accommodation of all prisons. To ensure comparability between years, adjustments are made to exclude payments to local authorities under section 53 of the Young Persons and Children's Act 1933, and to allow for transfers of work to or from the Service. Payments for prisons designed, constructed, managed and financed by the private sector are also excluded, as are the places so provided.

On this basis, the percentage change in unit costs in real terms between 1995–96 and 1996–97 is minus 3 per cent. This is based on forecast outturn for 1996–97.

The planned percentage reductions in real terms over the next three years are:

1997–98[1]: –1.1 per cent.

1998–99[2]: –2.3 per cent.

1999–2000[2]: 0.4 per cent.

These figures are subject to revision in the light of my right hon. Friend's reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) on 24 July, *Official Report*, column *682*, that the service will be allowed to spend £43 million extra this year and next to increase capacity to meet the rise in prisoner numbers. Changes in inflation assumptions would also affect the figures.

[1] Compared to previous year forecast outturn.

[2] Compared to previous year provision.

Prison Service

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his latest cash estimate of expenditure on the Prison Service in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99; and how these figures differ from those implied by the departmental spending plans set out in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98"; and if he will make a statement. [11247]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98" did not set a separate figure for Prison Service expenditure.

The expenditure plans of the Prison Service were set out in table 1 of the audit of Prison Service resources which we published on 25 July. That table gives details of transfers between the Prison Service and the Home Office and other Departments made since the conclusion of the 1996 public expenditure survey.

The expenditure plans set out in the audit have been increased as a result of my right hon. Friend's announcement on 24 July of increased funding for the Prison Service this year and next year, to help meet the pressure arising from prisoner population. The effect of those changes is to increase planned expenditure to:

1997–98: £1,774.5 million

1998–99: £1,733.3 million

Metropolitan Police (Sick Leave)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Metropolitan police officers have been on paid sick leave for *(a)* three months, *(b)* six months, *(c)* one year, *(d)* two years, *(e)* three years, *(f)* four years and *(g)* five years. [12015]

Mr. Michael: The management of sick leave has been devolved within the Metropolitan police service and the detailed breakdown of the information requested is not immediately available. I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible with a full response to his question.

Speed Cameras (Fines)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the value of fines collected as a result of the evidence of highway speed cameras *(a)* over the most recent months for which information is available and *(b)* over the 12 months preceding that. [11630]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is not available centrally.

Some estimate of the revenue received can be made from the fact that there were 36,916 prosecutions for speeding offences detected by automatic cameras in England and Wales in 1995, the latest year for which figures are available, and 20,630 in 1994. The average amount of fine imposed for all speeding offences in 1995 was £107—£113 in 1994. Not all fines will have been paid.

The majority of speeding offences detected by automatic cameras are dealt with by fixed penalty, 170,014 in 1995 and 95,510 in 1994, the current charge being £40.

Offences against the Person

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to implement the recommendations of Law Commission report No. 218 "Offences Against the Person and General Principles". [12215]

Mr. Straw: The Law Commission's report No. 218, published in November 1993, is a major contribution to the development of the criminal law. It was warmly welcomed by many involved with the criminal justice system as creating a clearer and more coherent statement of the law of violence against the person. The Government have considered the Law Commission's recommendations with great care, and accept the principle of its proposals for reform of those offences contained mainly in the Offences Against the Person Act 1861.

This is a complex and difficult area of the law, and case law has evolved since the Law Commission's report was first published. It is important that any proposals to reform offences that come before the courts so frequently, and have been in existence for 136 years, are robust, well thought through and well supported. Following a detailed consideration of their report, done in close collaboration with the Law Commission, we have decided to publish a draft Bill in a consultation paper later this year. This will set out our initial proposals for reforming the law in this area, based on the Law Commission's report, and seek views on some of the difficult issues around the technical legal changes proposed by the Law Commission, such as definitions of intent, recklessness and intoxication or whether the intentional transmission of disease should be included in the Bill. The proposals will apply to England and Wales.

In accepting the principle of reforming the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, the Government do not plan to take forward all the Law Commission's proposals at this juncture. In particular, the Law Commission made recommendations for setting out general defences of duress and the justifiable use of force in statute. We recognise the importance of these proposals, which are not directly related to the reform of the 1861 Act, but they raise some very difficult questions which should be considered separately and over a longer time scale.

Electoral Register

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision for electoral registration will be made for voters permanently resident in hospitals who are unable to register under the hospital's address. [12082]

Mr. George Howarth: The electoral registration officer is required by law to register all those who are resident in his or her area who appear to him or her to be eligible to vote. Only those who are patients in mental hospitals, whether voluntary or detained, are prevented by law from using, for the purposes of electoral registration, the address of the hospital in which they are resident.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provisions he will make for the registration of homeless voters for forthcoming by-elections and referendums. [12083]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Guidance issued to electoral registration officers makes it clear that no one should be denied the right to register simply because he or she is homeless. Although an elector must be registered at an address at which he or she is resident, that address need not be a conventional one. Any person who may have been missed off the register can make a claim to be added to it after publication, and it is for EROs to determine on the facts of each case whether an individual is eligible to register.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he plans to take to ensure that disabled voters have equal opportunities to register and vote in forthcoming by-elections and referendums. [12081]

Mr. O'Brien: It is the statutory duty of each electoral registration officer to include on the register for the area in which he acts the names of all those who appear to him to be eligible. Any eligible elector who may have been missed off the register can make a claim to be added to it after publication. District and London borough councils are statutorily required to designate as polling places, so far as is reasonable and practicable, only places which are accessible to the disabled. Acting returning officers may also apply to the Home Office or the Scottish Office for grants towards the cost of providing temporary ramps and polling screens adapted for use by the disabled which may be used at elections and referendums. There is no cap on the number of applications which the acting returning officer may make for grant assistance.

Intrusive Surveillance Code

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will confirm the arrangements for the public consultation exercise on the intrusive surveillance code of practice required under part III of the Police Act 1997. [12320]

Mr. Michael: Further to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Ms Jones) on 16 July, *Official Report*, column *176*. I have now decided that the public consultation exercise should begin on 12 August.

Stephen Lawrence

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish an inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence on 22 April 1993. [12275]

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make an announcement on the actions to be taken by his Department towards the murder of Stephen Lawrence; and if he will make a statement. [12277]

Mr. Straw: I have decided to establish an inquiry under section 49 of the Police Act 1996. The terms of reference of that inquiry will be:

> to inquire into the matters arising from the death of Stephen Lawrence on 22 April 1993 to date, in order particularly to identify the lessons to be learned for the investigation and prosecution of racially motivated crimes.

I have appointed Sir William MacPherson of Cluny, formerly High Court judge of the Queen's Bench, to conduct this inquiry. He will be supported in carrying out this inquiry by Mr. Thomas Cook, former deputy chief constable of West Yorkshire, the Right Reverend John Sentamu, Bishop of Stepney, and Dr. Richard Stone, chairman of the Jewish Council for Racial Equality. Under section 49, the inquiry will have the powers to summon any person to give evidence, to require the production of documents and to take evidence on oath.

The handling of this case by the Metropolitan police is the subject of complaints made by the Lawrence family which are currently under investigation in accordance with police complaints procedures. That investigation is being supervised by the Police Complaints Authority. The authority expects the investigation to be completed in September and to report the outcome in October. Under section 97(2) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the authority may make a report to the Secretary of State on any matters coming to its notice to which it considers that his attention should be drawn by reason of their gravity or of other exceptional circumstances. The authority intends to produce a report on this case under that special provision. Under section 97(5) of the 1984 Act, that report must be laid before Parliament and published.

The inquiry under the Police Act will begin when the Police Complaints Authority report has been completed. That will allow the inquiry to consider any issues emerging from the investigation supervised by the Police Complaints Authority. The inquiry's statutory powers will also allow it to require the production of any evidence gathered during the course of the Police Complaints Authority investigation. My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has also confirmed that the full co-operation of the Crown Prosecution Service will be given to the inquiry.

I believe that the establishment of this inquiry following the completion of the investigation supervised by the Police Complaints Authority will allow the concerns of the Lawrence family and others to be fully addressed, and will identify the lessons to be learned from this tragic case which will be relevant to the future handling by the criminal justice system of racially motivated crimes.

Drugs

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the "Tackling Drugs Together" initiative. [11909]

Mrs. Anne Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are continuing to implement the "Tackling Drugs Together" strategy for England initiated by the previous Administration. The UK anti-drugs co-ordinator will review progress, on appointment, and submit proposals for a new strategy.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Market Testing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of state for Social Security what plans she has to stop further market testing of services within her Department. [4609]

Mr. Field: Market testing, part of the competing for quality initiative introduced under the previous Administration, is one of several ways the Department of Social Security has assessed the value of involving the private sector in the delivery of services.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney).

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the PFI projects currently being undertaken by her Department, indicating in each case *(a)* the expected savings, *(b)* the savings to date, *(c)* the cost to date, *(d)* whether the projects are on target or delayed, *(e)* the extent of any delay, *(f)* whether the delay is due to the civil service or agency or the private partner and *(g)* the projected total cost. [6246]

Mr. Field: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given today by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney).

We currently have two PFI contracts—the automation of benefit payments through Post Office outlets—BA POCL—and a replacement for the national insurance recording system NIRS2:

NIRS2

The contract was signed in May 1995, allowing for a phased delivery between February 1997 and April 1999. It is expected to cost some 60 per cent. less than a public sector development. Although there are no operational savings thus far, there will also be no payment to the service provider until NIRS1 is replaced in April 1998.

Under the original contract, NIRS1 was to be replaced in February 1997. In fact, it will not be decommissioned until April 1998. However, the first release of NIRS2 was delivered as planned in February 1997 and the whole development phase remains on schedule for completion in April 1999. The revised implementation date was at the request of the service provider.

The contractor charge will be volume driven, but, over the life of the contract, it is estimated to be some £45 million.

BA POCL

The project is at an early stage. Implementation of the benefit payment card began in October 1996 with a trial involving child benefit recipients. Other benefits will be added to the system over the next few years. The project is expected to be cost-neutral in administrative terms, but, over its life, savings are expected of some £1,200 million from reduced fraud losses.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy on whether to increase the proportion of Benefits Agency staff on casual or fixed-term contract basis; and what assessment has been made of the consequent impact on morale and staff quality. [7988]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Modernising the social security system is a key priority of the Government, We will streamline services to provide better, simpler, more efficient services to clients. The staffing of the Benefits Agency is a matter for Peter Mathison, its chief executive, I have asked him to write the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Mark Todd, dated 31 July 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the policy on increasing the proportion of Benefit Agency (BA) staff on casual or fixed term contract basis; and what assessment has been made of the consequent impact on morale and staff quality.

The use of casual and fixed term appointments (FTA) has always been an integral part of our staff planning to allow managers to cater for fluctuations in workloads and to staff short term projects.

Although no formal assessment has been made of the impact of these measures, the Agency recognises that some FTA and casual staff may feel insecure. The Agency has to strike a balance between the needs of the business and those of the workforce. Both FTA and casual staff are given comprehensive training equivalent to that provided for permanent staff. They are also included in the Agency's performance appraisal arrangements to ensure that they remain motivated, that their development needs are identified and that their potential is maximised.

Widow's Benefits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will introduce measures to ensure that women in polygamous marriages are not denied widow's benefits; and if she will estimate the cost to public funds of paying benefit. [10292]

Mr. Denham: The concept of marriage under British law is fundamentally monogamous. It would, therefore be inappropriate to pay widow's benefit to widows who, at the time of the death of their husbands, were in a polygamous marriage.

Information is not available on the cost to public funds of paying benefit in all such cases.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average order for payment made by the Child Support Agency in respect of absent parents who are *(a)* employed and *(b)* self-employed. [10526]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government believe that children are entitled to the support of both parents. The child support scheme is designed to provide levels of maintenance which absent parents can realistically afford.

The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mrs. Faith Boardman to Mr. Peter Bradley, dated 30 July 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about maintenance assessments.

The latest figures available show that as at 28 February 1997, the average full maintenance assessment for employed absent parents was £39.02; for those who were self employed the average full maintenance assessment was £23.72.

The difference in the value of the assessments is due to the level of net income of absent parents who are employees and those who are self employed. The average net income for an employed absent parent was £191.83; for an absent parent who was self employed the figure was £150.00.

I hope this is helpful.

Lone Parents

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many lone parents are currently receiving income support; and what estimate she has made of the number of lone parents likely to be in receipt of income support in each of the next five financial years. [10771]

Mr. Keith Bradley: It is estimated that as at August 1996, the latest date for which information is available, there were 1,061,000 lone parents receiving income support in Great Britain. Available estimates of the number of lone parents likely to be in receipt of income support in the future are in the table. New estimates of the number of lone parents in receipt of income support, taking into account the new deal for lone parents, will be available in October.

Lone parents in receipt of income support

1996–97: 1,057,000

1997–98: 1,054,000

1998–99: 1,044,000

1999–00: 1,054,000

Notes:

1. Figures are consistent with those given in tables 6 and 7 in the 1997 Social Security departmental report, published before the new deal was announced, and are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and as such are subject to a degree of sampling variation.

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if she will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by her Department in each of the last five years; [11564]

(2) what plans she has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for her Department; [11562]

(3) if she will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste within her department. [11563]

Mr. Denham: One of our key aims is to promote policies that sustain the environment.

No record is kept of the amount of paper recycled. However, waste paper is sorted in all social security offices into two categories, "Confidential/Restricted" and "Other". All "Confidential/Restricted" waste is recycled and other paper is subject to best practices which includes reusing paper and the disposal of paper in green bins.

The Department has produced a green guide for use locally throughout its estate which includes guidance on the recycling of paper, drinks cans, glass, plastic, printer toner cartridges and batteries. In addition contacts have been appointed in each DSS business unit/agency who are responsible for promoting green issues.

There are no targets set to minimise waste. However, a benchmarking exercise to baseline current volumes and costs is scheduled to be completed early next year and we will be considering introducing targets when the accommodation and services contracts are re-let.

Private Pensions (Regulation)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what regulatory reform the Government propose in respect of private pension provision. [11823]

Mr. Denham: On 17 July, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a wide-ranging review of pensions. One of the pension challenges to which my right hon. Friend referred was the need to get the regulation of pensions right. The personal pensions mis-selling scandal illustrates too clearly what can go wrong when pensions are not properly regulated. Appropriate regulation provides security for members, minimises the scope for abuse and does not impose an undue burden on providers.

As part of the review, we are taking stock of the way the recent pension reforms are being implemented, and we have already begun consultation with interested parties, including employers, employees, the pensions industry, the regulatory authorities and others.

We will also consult fully on our plans to develop new stakeholder pensions to offer secure, flexible, value-for-money second pensions, particularly to those who cannot join an employer's occupational scheme and whose pay is low or who have intermittent wages; and a framework of citizenship pensions for those who assume responsibility as carers and who cannot build up a second pension scheme in their own right.

The review will enable the Government to publish an initial framework for change in the first part of 1998. There will then be a period of further consultation before firm proposals for legislation are developed.

Income Support (Earnings Disregard)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the cost of increasing the earnings disregard for income support to *(a)* £30 and *(b)* £50 per week. [11580]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Our objective is to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to promote work incentives. We will develop a system that supports work, savings and honesty. Our first steps are to focus on helping people off welfare and into work and to review the central areas of insecurity for older people.

The information is in the table.

Increase in earnings disregard on income support	*Estimated cost*
Increase to £30	Between £45 million and £55 million
Increase to £50	Between £65 million and £110 million

1. Estimates are based on the 1994–95 "Family Resource Survey", and the May 1996 "Quarterly Statistical Enquiry", uprated to 1997–98 levels of prices and benefit levels. Numbers of income support cases with earnings have been uprated to be in line with caseload forecasts underlying the 1997 departmental report.

2. The range reflects uncertainty as to whether new claimants will be in receipt of income support or income-related jobseeker's allowance. The cost excludes the cost of families, in receipt of family credit, with a partner working between 16 and 24 hours who would become better off on income support, as it has been assumed that they would claim income-related jobseeker's allowance.

Disabled Claimants

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the cost to date of implementing the benefits integrity programme for disabled claimants; and what savings are estimated to be achieved in the first year of operation. [11977]

Mr. Denham: One of our key aims is rebuilding integrity in, and public support for the social security system. The administration of this programme is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Bob Blizzard, dated 31 July 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the cost and savings of the Benefit Integrity Programme.

The cost of implementing the Benefit Integrity Project is £1,099,440 for the period 28 April 1997 to 30 June 1997. These are the latest available.

The estimated programme expenditure savings attributed to the Benefit Integrity Project for the current year is £27m.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

War Pensions

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the list of regional consultants and their specialties held by the War Pensions Agency is available to the public; and whether claimants have the right to see reports written by regional consultants relating to their case. [12186]

Mr. Denham: Queries on operational matters concerning the War Pensions Agency are for its chief executive Mr. Kevin Caldwell. I have asked him to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from K. C. Caldwell to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 31 July 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the availability of the list of regional consultants used by the War Pensions Agency.

The list of regional consultants and their specialities held by this Agency is available to members of the public on request. A copy of a regional consultant report is sent to a War Pension claimant on request provided that we are sure its disclosure would not harm the health or welfare of the claimant.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the gross and net cost of changing the assessment of housing benefit to a fixed six-monthly assessment in the manner of family credit. [12196]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information requested is not available.

Housing benefit is being reviewed as part of a joint housing review with my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. In addition Mr. Martin Taylor has been asked by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to examine the interaction of the tax and benefits systems so that they can be streamlined and modernised, so as to fulfil our objectives of promoting work incentives, reducing poverty and welfare dependency and strengthening family and community life.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to support new housing benefit claimants whose rent includes an element for social care costs, following the recent court judgment indicating that such costs are not covered by the housing benefit system. [11613]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Following the recent court judgment on the scope of housing benefit my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced, on the same day, a package of interim measures designed to:

Continue the vast majority of Housing benefit expenditure on support services in existing housing provision; and

introduce a compensation scheme to protect the position of claimants in existing supported housing by compensating landlords whose tenants lose income as a result of the changes.

We are consulting the Social Security Advisory Committee and local authority associations on draft legislation to enable housing benefit, which is designed to meet housing costs rather than to make general social provision for the protection of vulnerable people in their homes, to meet the majority of charges for general support services in supported accommodation. We hope to legislate as soon as possible.

These measures will apply to current and future tenants of existing supported housing. They will last until we develop and implement a coherent and rational long-term funding arrangement for supported housing.

Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate she has made of the savings from presenting officers no longer attending tribunals; [12100]

(2) what steps she is taking to ensure the continued independence of the tribunal system following the alterations regarding the attendance of presenting officers. [12101]

Mr. Keith Bradley: It is our policy that presenting officers should attend oral hearings of tribunals. The non-attendance of presenting officers in the Huddersfield area is being investigated and I will write to my hon. Friend in due course.

Claims (Backdating)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate she has made of the cost effect of removing the discretion of adjudication officers with regard to the backdating of claims; [12078]

(2) what steps her Department is taking to ensure that genuine claimants are not penalised by the removal of discretion for adjudication officers with regard to backdated claims. [12077]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The changes to the backdating rules in April removed the administratively onerous good cause provision and replaced it with special reasons set out in regulations. These special reasons apply to income related benefits which are meant to meet immediate needs. It is, therefore, reasonable to limit the range of situations which count as a special reason for a late claim and it underlines the importance of claimants making their claims promptly.

Claims for non-income related benefits, such as retirement pension and child benefit, can receive backdating automatically without the need to show that there was a special reason for the delay.

We are committed to modernising and streamlining the structure and delivery of social security to make the system simpler for the public to understand and more straightforward for staff to administer. These changes went some way to simplify the complex rules for backdating benefits.

Disability Appeals Tribunals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 24 July, *Official Report*, column *747*, in what proportion of appeals to *(a)* social security and *(b)* disability appeal tribunals an oral hearing is requested by (i) an adjudication officer and (ii) either of the parties; in each case how many (A) oral hearings (1) in the presence of the appellant or a representative and (2) in absence and (B) paper hearings took place in each month since 1 April; what were the success rates for appeals in each of these categories; and if she will place in the Library a report on the effects of the changes to the appeals system introduced on 21 October 1996. [12087]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Evaluation of the changes introduced to the appeal system on 21 October 1996 is underway. When the evaluation is complete, a report will be placed in the Library. Detailed assessments, such as the data requested, will not be available for some months. However, on investigation of the availability of this data, it has come to light that the information provided in my answer of 24 July may be incorrect, for which I apologise. I will write to the hon. Member with clarification in due course.

Mortgage Interest Benefit

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what assessment she has made of the effect on payments of mortgage interest benefit under income support arrangements of the lack of flexibility available to the Benefits Agency to match the payment cycles of lenders; [11990]

(2) what plans she has to permit flexibility in the payment of mortgage interest benefit in respect of lenders who do not follow a four week payment cycle. [11991]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 28 July, *Official Report*, column *19*.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance has been given to doctors employed by the Benefits Agency to determine whether claimants are entitled to continue receiving incapacity benefit. [11982]

Mr. Denham: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Bob Blizzard, dated 31 July 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking what guidance has been given to doctors employed by the Benefits Agency to determine whether claimants are entitled to continue receiving incapacity Benefit (IB).

It may be helpful if I first explain that doctors employed by the Benefits Agency do not determine entitlement to IB. Entitlement to IB is decided by Adjudication Officers (AOs) who consider all the evidence available, including reports from medical examinations.

Doctors who conduct examinations in connection with IB are required to undergo a four day modular training course which can be tailored to meet individual needs. Elements of the course include the technical aspects of IB, the requirements for the content of the medical report form, selecting and justifying the choice of descriptors which specify the level of a customer's disability in each functional area, and mental health problems. The course includes elements of training on customer services and equal opportunities.

Following initial training, the first three assessments carried out by the Benefits Agency Medical Services (BAMS) doctor are monitored, and each must reach a satisfactory standard for the doctor to be approved to carry out future IB assessments. The work of all doctors is monitored subsequently by BAMS. This takes the form of random or targeted studies of completed reports, and is also carried out in response to any work returned by Adjudication Officers which is considered to be of an unsatisfactory standard. There is an ongoing training programme which ensures that doctors are kept informed of any developments in this areas of work.

In addition, all full time BAMS doctors have to undergo a two day residential course covering the clinical areas they are likely to encounter, such as back pain and psychiatric disorders, as well as those likely to cause particular difficulties, such as chronic fatigue states. Many of the sessions in these courses are conducted by internationally recognised experts in their fields.

In addition to the training, all doctors are issued with a copy of the "IB Handbook for Medical Services Doctors", which acts as an aide memoir. A copy of this publication is available in the Library of the House of Commons.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Poverty

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what role she plans for mutual, voluntary and co-operative organisations in her anti-poverty strategy; and if she will make a statement. *[12220]*

Mr. Keith Bradley: Our objective is to improve the living standards of the many, not just the few, and to provide educational and employment opportunities for all. The best way to tackle poverty is to help people into real jobs, and we have recently announced our new deal to move people into employment. We welcome any contributions made by mutual, voluntary and co-operative organisations towards achieving this aim. For example, we are working with Gingerbread and the National Council of One Parent Families on the new deal for lone parents, and we meet regularly with organisations such as Child Poverty Action Group and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Benefits Offices, Wales

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the future of benefits offices in Wales. [11992]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Mr. Ruane) on 24 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *748–49*.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidelines have been issued concerning the assessment of claims for the jobseeker's allowance; what further guidelines she plans to publish; and if she will make a statement. [11918]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The chief adjudication officer, who has statutory responsibility for issuing guidance to adjudication officers, has revised the adjudication officers' guide to include guidance on the assessment of claims to jobseeker's allowance. The AOG is readily available to members of the public at social security offices and most major public libraries, and is regularly updated to reflect changes in legislation and decisions made by the social security commissioners.

The Government believe that work is the best form of welfare for people of working age. Our welfare-to-work objectives are to provide work incentives, to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to strike a new balance between responsibilities and rights. A programme of monitoring and evaluation is under way to enable us to ensure that jobseeker's allowance contributes to achieving our objectives.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans she has to change the appeal and tribunal process relating to claims made for the jobseeker's allowance; and if she will make a statement; [11916]

(2) how many appeals have been made against decisions to *(a)* withdraw and *(b)* deny receipt of the jobseeker's allowance; how many hearings have been heard under the appeal system; how much notice is given of the date of a hearing; and if she will make a statement. [11904]

Mr. Bradley: On 9 July, we introduced the Social Security Bill which will modernise the delivery of social security. The Bill contains measures to provide a more streamlined, efficient and faster appeals system for social security benefits including jobseeker's allowance. We shall be setting and publishing demanding targets and reporting on the results.

The information regarding jobseeker's allowance appeals is not available in the format requested. The available information is as follows.

At the end of June, the independent tribunal service had received 24,802 appeals involving jobseeker's allowance. A total of 8,620 appeals have been cleared; 3,884 at hearings. Regulations require the ITS to provide a minimum of seven days notice of the date of a hearing. The ITS routinely provides more notice than this, however, and in many areas is currently giving three to four weeks' advance notification.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what funding is presently committed from her departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and if she will make a statement. [11896]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Funding for the cost of preventive and remedial action on year 2000 in this Department is being met from existing budgets by making economies and by reprioritising existing work programmes. The initial broad estimate of the total cost is £30 million. Work is well advanced to refine this estimate and detailed and costed action plans will be available by the end of October 1997.

National Benefit Inquiry Line

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to restore the free phone national benefit inquiry line; and what assessment she has made of the impact of the withdrawal of the free phone national benefit inquiry line on the take-up of income-related benefits. [11112]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* We will streamline services to provide better, simpler more efficient services to claimants and other customers. There are no plans to restore the Benefits Agency freeline service. Queries on operational matters are for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 31 July 1997:

> The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning the Benefits Agency Freeline service.
>
> There are no plans to restore the Benefits Agency Freeline. Advice and information about benefit entitlement is available through the Agency's network of local benefit offices. Benefit literature is readily available in local offices, post offices and numerous other outlets.
>
> As part of the changes required to deliver a modern service to the public we will look again at the availability of freephone and local rate telephone services.

Advice and information on benefits for the disabled, their representatives and carers is available from the Benefit Enquiry Line. The freephone number is 0800 882200.

There was no monitoring of the take up of income related benefits when the Freeline was open and there is no evidence to suggest that the closure of the service has had any material impact on the take up of these benefits.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Outsourcing Projects

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the outcome of her review of the outsourcing projects initiated by the previous Government. [12323]

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what criteria she has adopted in her considerations of transferring the ownership and management of her Department's property estate to the private sector. [11880]

(2) what assessment she has made of the employment implications of transferring the ownership and management of the Department's property estate to the private sector; [11926]

(3) what plans she has for transfer of the ownership and management of her Department's property estate to the private sector; and if she will make a statement. [11877]

Ms Harman: I can today announce how we intend to proceed on a number of projects designed to involve the private sector in the delivery of social security. The decisions we have taken on these projects, which were inherited from the previous Administration, are in support of our commitment to modernise the delivery of social security to make it simpler, better and more efficient.

The manifesto made it clear that:

this would be a government of ideas and ideals but not of outdated ideology, what counts is what works;

it would reject the dogmatic view that services must be privatised to be of high quality, but equally we see no reason why a service should be delivered directly if more efficient means are available;

We have reviewed the projects inherited against:

our objectives for modernising the social security system;

our commitment to work within the announced spending totals for the first two years of Government;

our aim of getting best value for public money and of reducing the burden on taxpayers;

the scope to apply private sector expertise, discipline and economies of scale in procuring public services and the ability to secure increased investment from the private sector;

the need for continuing flexibility for government to make future changes to services;

the opportunities for improving the quality of service for customers; and

the implications for staff.

We believe that there has been evidence in past privatisation of:

Cost cutting at the expense of concern for quality. In support of our clear commitment to a quality social security service we will establish a minimum quality of service threshold against which we will assess all bids from the private sector. If a supplier fails to reach this threshold, we will not expect to award them a contract no matter how low their price;

Insufficient priority to managing conformance to quality of service standards during the contract period. We will tackle this by strengthening the contract monitoring regime to include a stronger assessment of suppliers' performance on service quality. We will also require greater evaluation and feedback on performance against the new quality standards;

Insufficient attention to the concerns of staff. We have made clear our commitment to take account of the needs of staff in considering the involvement of the private sector. We will therefore place greater emphasis on management of people when evaluating contracts; we will carefully evaluate suppliers' management of past staff transfers; and we will issue new guidance to potential and current suppliers, making clear what we believe to be good employment practice;

The conclusions we have reached on the individual projects are as follows:

Estates and accommodation services (PRIME)

We propose to proceed with PRIME—private sector resource initiative for management of the estate—which will transfer the ownership and management of the DSS estate to the private sector. The project will bring specialist private sector expertise to the management of the estate, delivering reduced operating costs, increased flexibility to respond to the changing patterns of service delivery, and scope for additional investment in property improvements. The property transfer will enable us to secure full value for the large DSS estate and to share in gains from further property development, while retaining departmental control on the location of outlets.

As well as the PRIME project, we also propose to explore whether further private sector involvement could improve the delivery of associated office support services, mainly in the Benefits Agency. High-quality service to customers requires effective support to staff in services such as typing and reprographics. These services are currently delivered through a patchwork of public and private sector teams as a result of previous market tests. The current approach does not guarantee quality or efficiency and has not been flexible to changes in service delivery. The PRIME contract requires some reorganisation of office service arrangements and provides an opportunity to reorganise on more efficient lines. We now propose to start the process of testing what the in-house teams could do, under a more effective contracts regime, and what the private sector could offer. Before taking final decisions, we will ensure that any transfer to the private sector meets our new strengthened criteria on quality of service, evaluation of performance and concern for the staff issues.

Child benefit centre (PROSPECT)

PROSPECT was established by the previous Government to outsource child benefit and guardian allowance operations in Washington. The previous Government's proposals were driven by dogma and we will not proceed with them. We wish instead to see a proper examination of options other than full scale outsourcing.

There is a need to improve the quality of service at the child benefit centre, and we have asked officials to prepare an alternative approach based on our principles for a modern service. Options for involving the private sector will be considered in this context.

Benefits agency medical services

The IMPACT 97 project was established to transfer the delivery of Benefits Agency medical services—BAMS—to the private sector. The bulk of doctors who provide the medical advice and conduct medical examinations in support of benefit claims are independent contractors, not employed by the Department. The future of BAMS has been under discussion for several years now; the majority of non-medical support staff involved have chosen to transfer to an external company if the project goes ahead, and staff want an end to the uncertainty. There have also been extensive negotiations with contractors who are aware that a final announcement is imminent.

We have decided to proceed with this project, involving the private sector to bring enhanced management expertise to BAMS, with investment in new technology, delivering reduced running costs and service improvements. As a result of the outsourcing, we expect to see an improved quality of service to customers, covering areas such as the arrangements for making appointments for examinations, the process for delivering medical advice on benefit claims and the quality of the accommodation in medical examination centres.

We will now proceed to invite final bids from the contractors shortlisted. The final decision on award of contracts will feature further qualitative evaluation of potential suppliers' management capability for provision of the service and an evaluation of the arrangements for the transfer of staff affected.

BA area director partnerships (ADAPT)

The ADAPT project was established to deliver a two-phase approach to involvement of the private sector. The first phase entails a period of partnership between three private sector consortia and three BA area directorates which will explore, without payment from the taxpayer, whether external input can help our objectives to modernise the delivery of social security. The approach fits well with this Government's approach to public–private partnerships. It enables us to bring in external expertise to identify new ways of working and to test what the partners have to offer without commitment to any particular outcome. We have decided that the project should continue and the three partners will be announced shortly. If the first phase produces effective proposals for improving service delivery, we may proceed to a second stage and award contracts for delivery of services.

Contributions Agency competitive benchmarking

In addition to the series of outsourcing projects, we have also reviewed the project within the Contributions Agency to benchmark services against the private sector. The CA benchmarking programme assesses the scope to apply private sector expertise, discipline and economies of scale in procuring public services. The ongoing programme has so far tested the quality and scope for improvement of three areas of the Contributions Agency operations—international services, deferment of national insurance contributions, and insolvency services.

This benchmarking programme meets our criteria, adopting a non-dogmatic approach of judging things by what works; avoiding a single presumption that the private or the public sector is always the solution and assessing the best way forward against the scope for improvement by existing staff.

We have decided that Contributions Agency staff should continue to manage international services and deferment, bringing in improvements in service through in-house efficiency measures. On insolvency services, which handle national insurance debts of insolvent companies and bankrupt individuals, we have concluded that we should begin the testing of offers from external suppliers, applying our strengthened principles for involvement of the private sector. The early indications from the benchmarking programme confirm that there may be gains to be made from testing our service against the best in the private sector. We have decided that the competitive benchmarking process in the Contributions Agency should continue, extending to other areas of service.

Stand-alone support IT applications (SASA)

The Department has a major programme of IT change and we have decided that it should concentrate its expertise on the development and maintenance of key strategic mainframe systems. The development and management of stand-alone systems will be more effectively supported in the private sector, which has greater expertise in this area and will be able to deliver a better quality service at reduced costs. We have therefore decided to proceed with the transfer to the private sector of the development, support and maintenance of the Department's non-strategic, stand-alone, business support computer systems—SASA. The contract will cover around 740 systems ranging from those on a single PC to networked applications running up to 200 PCs, using a diverse range of software packages.

Conclusion

These decisions on the involvement of the private sector will help to deliver a modernised social security service. Where our modernisation strategy entails involvement of the private sector in the future, we will apply the criteria we have set out for the review of outsourcing, asking of every project, "Does it work? Is it fair—to customers, taxpayers and staff?".

A separate announcement will be made in respect of services in Northern Ireland. Further details on the individual projects will be announced in the very near future.

Benefit Review

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she will publish the results of the recent benefit review of income support; and if she will make a statement. [12472]

Mr. Denham: This Government take fraud against our social security system very seriously and are determined to reduce the level of fraud and abuse. Fraud is anti-social behaviour; assisting in the fight against fraud is an expression of responsible citizenship.

We have inherited a significant problem and this research underlines the need to review and evaluate existing measures. Work is in hand to re-examine the strategic objectives governing counter-fraud work throughout the Department. This will ensure that there is coherence between counter-fraud objectives and other policy and operational strategic objectives, in particular those aimed at controlling loss of programme expenditure.

All plans for the future will be based on making sure that the social security system is based on honesty, fairness and responsibility. We will also move towards a more systematic process of assessing risks to ensure that resources are targeted for maximum effect.

The level of fraud and abuse represents a serious problem which we are determined to consider carefully and respond to fully.

In order to establish the size of the problem on an ongoing basis the Benefits Agency is undertaking a five-year programme of reviews. This programme covers all the major social security benefits to measure in a statistically valid way the level of incorrectness, including fraud within the benefit stream.

A review of income support was carried out through visits and interviews with a random sample of 4,350 customers in autumn 1996 when a review of their benefit entitlement was completed.

The results of this review show that the majority of customers—79 per cent.—are entitled to the benefit at the rate they are receiving.

However, fraud or a high suspicion of fraud was found in just over 11 per cent. of cases representing estimated annual potential expenditure losses of £1.77 billion on income support.

We will be hosting a fraud seminar in September. This will involve high-level representatives from both inside and outside of Government. Private sector expertise will be brought alongside those already involved to exchange and develop ideas and experience to ensure that we are tackling the problem in the most effective manner.

Domestic Fuel (VAT)

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the impact on the uprating of the basic state weekly pension for *(a)* single person and *(b)* a couple of a 3 per cent. change in the value added tax rate on domestic fuel. [11789]

Mr. Denham: The change in the VAT rate on domestic fuel will have no impact on the real value of the basic state pension.

We are committed to uprating the basic state pension at least in line with prices and will consider the uprating of benefits at the normal time and in the normal way.

All pensioners will benefit from the reduction in their fuel bills following the reduction in the VAT rate on domestic fuel from 8 to 5 per cent.

Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to exempt claimants of the industrial injuries disablement benefit from her proposed restrictions on backdating; and what procedures will be introduced to protect disabled people whose conditions are not immediately diagnosed. [11583]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Clause 70 of the Social Security Bill provides for the alignment of the time limits for the backdating of claims to benefit with the one month currently allowed for reviews. This provision is an integral part of modernising and streamlining the social security system. It will make the system easier to operate and simpler for people to understand. It will also underline the importance of people making their claims promptly.

The Social Security Bill also provides for regulations to prescribe exceptions to the one-month time limit. We are currently giving careful consideration to what, if any, circumstances there might be in which exceptions ought to apply.

People who qualify for industrial injuries benefits already receive a substantial preference in that their benefits are non-contributory and tax-free and are payable on top of any mainstream incapacity and disablement benefits to which they may also be entitled.

SCOTLAND

Feudal System

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made by the Scottish Law Commission in its review of the feudal system. [12474]

Mr. Dewar: The Government gave a manifesto commitment to initiate a study into land ownership and management in Scotland, including the options for removing the rights of feudal superiors.

The feudal system is anachronistic and makes conveyancing more expensive than it need be. It also allows unscrupulous superiors to charge excessive amounts for granting consent to alterations or changes of use of property.

I am therefore delighted that the Scottish Law Commission will be able to submit a report on the abolition of feudal tenure, with draft legislation in 1998—one year earlier than expected. At the same time, the commission will issue a discussion paper on related questions of real burdens. It will report on those questions by the end of 1999.

The effect of the two reports will be to sweep away superiorities, replace the feudal system with a system based on absolute ownership, and reform the law on real burdens.

The Government are committed to the introduction of legislation to abolish the feudal system as soon as we can after the commission reports. It may be necessary to carry out further consultations following publication of the reports, but I very much hope that the legislation will be one of the first reforms to be enacted by the Scottish Parliament. It would be most fitting if Scotland entered the new millennium not only with a new Parliament but with a completely modernised system of land tenure.

Hunting

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will announce which officials will conduct the review of hunting on Forestry Commission land. [7916]

Mr. Chisholm: The review of hunting on Forestry Commission land is an internal review which is being carried out by the Forestry commissioners and commission officials as a normal part of their duties.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) for what reason a review of hunting on Forestry Commission land has been commenced; and when it will be conducted; [8837]

(2) who will be invited to give evidence to the Forestry Commissions review of hunting on Forestry Commission land; [8835]

(3) which officials will be involved in the review of hunting on Forestry Commission land; [8838]

(4) when he expects to publish the results of the review of hunting on Forestry Commission land; [8834]

(5) how much he estimates the review of hunting on Forestry Commission land will cost the Forestry Commission. [8836]

Mr. Chisholm *[holding answer 22 July 1997]:* Against the background of our manifesto commitment to allow a free vote on hunting, we have asked the Forestry commissioners to review their policy for hunting over commission land, and to advise us of their conclusions. This is an internal review which will not be published, but which will take full account of representations received. The review is being carried out by the Forestry commissioners and commission officials as a normal part of their duties and will not be costed separately. The commissioners aim to complete their review later this summer.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what factors led him to carry out a review of hunting on Forestry Commission land; [10281]

(2) which officials will carry out a review of hunting on Forestry Commission land; [10282]

(3) who will give evidence to the review of hunting on Forestry Commission land. [10284]

Mr. Chisholm: Against the background of our manifesto commitment to allow a free vote on hunting, we have asked the forestry commissioners to review their policy for hunting over commission land, and to advise us of their conclusions. This internal review is being carried out by the forestry commissioners and commission officials and will take full account of representations received.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much he has budgeted for expenditure on refurbishing *(a)* official residences occupied by Scottish Office Ministers and *(b)* Scottish Office properties. [7745]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 14 July 1997]:* Under current public expenditure plans, total provision for refurbishment work over the next three years is as follows:

(a) Bute house, which provides occasional accommodation for Ministers—£35,000. This budget is for replacing some of the furniture originally provided on loan by the National Trust for Scotland as these pieces will be recalled by the original owners later this year.

(b) Scottish Office properties—£6,515,300. The figure excludes the operational assets of the Scottish Prison Service, the Scottish Court Service and Historic Scotland. Most of the expenditure in fact relates to the refurbishment of St. Andrew's House—£6 million.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer of 16 July, *Official Report,* column *220,* if he will itemise the same expenditure plans including all changes announced since the publication of "Serving Scotland's Needs", including the itemised figures for each year from 1994–95 to 1999–2000 in cash and real terms at 1996–97 prices using the gross domestic product deflator; if he will set out the cumulative spending planned from 1997–98 to 1999–2000 under each item in real terms and the total cumulative spending, assuming that spending is maintained at 1996–97 real-term levels; and if he will indicate the difference between the two cumulative totals. [10271]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Government Expenditure and Revenue

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the date for publication of the new edition of "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland". [7744]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 14 July 1997]:* "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland, 1995–96" will be published in the first half of November 1997.

Council House Repairs

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what sum has been spent by each local authority and its predecessor authorities on repairs and improvements to council houses in each of the last five years *(a)* in total and *(b)* per 100 homes managed by the council. [9610]

Mr. Chisholm: I shall write to the hon. Member and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of the Scottish Office operation at Dover house in each of the last three years. [10172]

Mr. Dewar: The cost of the Scottish Office operation at Dover house in each of the last three years was £1,925,000, £1,745,000 and £1,740,000 in 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 respectively. These figures do not include the costs of Ministers or of staff who are based in Edinburgh but who travel to Dover house for part of the working week while Parliament is in session.

Literacy and Numeracy

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, (1) pursuant to his answer of 17 July, what data his Department holds on numeracy levels among 16 to 24-year-olds in Scotland; [10128]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 16 July, *Official Report*, column *220*, what data his Department currently holds concerning literacy levels among 16 to 24-year-olds in Scotland. [10129]

Mr. Wilson: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Dance and Music Tuition

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with representatives of *(a)* Scottish local authorities, *(b)* Scottish parents and *(c)* Scottish teachers concerning the resources available for (i) dance and (ii) music tuition. [10374]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* My right hon. Friend has recently met representatives of the Friends of the Dance School of Scotland, at Knightswood secondary school, to discuss funding concerns. My right hon. Friend is still considering this issue.

Woodlands

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much new woodland has been planted with Government incentives in each year since 1979. [10984]

Mr. Chisholm *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The area of new woodland planted in Great Britain with Government incentives since 1979 is set out in the table.

Year ended 31 March	*Area (hectares)*
1980	8,302
1981	8,400
1982	12,462
1983	12,511
1984	16,673
1985	16,029
1986	19,019
1987	19,147
1988	23,821
1989	25,108
1990	15,406
1991	15,436
1992	14,147
1993	15,295
1994	15,897
1995	18,128
1996	14,975
1997	15,971

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what targets he plans to set in respect of the increase in the proportion of woodland areas in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland by 2010. [11147]

Mr. Chisholm: Although we are committed to increasing the area of woodland in Britain, we have not set any specific targets.

Computer-related Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of total departmental expenditure on computer-related current and capital work for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [11386]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

A1

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the impact of daily return lorry journeys arising from the transport of rubbish from Edinburgh to Oxwellmains on traffic flows on the A1 road at Pencraig Hill. [11061]

Mr. Chisholm *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* The road layout at Pencraig Hill can accommodate the anticipated additional 60 heavy goods vehicle movements per day which are forecast to be generated by the movement of land waste by road from Edinburgh to the new landfill site at Oxwellmains. These additional movements are not considered to have a significant impact on the A1.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will withdraw the consent for the transport of rubbish from Edinburgh to the new landfill site at Oxwellmains until the A1 road has been dualled between Haddington and Dunbar. [11062]

Mr. Chisholm *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* Planning consent for the landfill site and conditions attached to that consent are a matter for East Lothian council.

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many payments were made under the arable area payments scheme in 1996 at *(a)* £0 to £1,000, *(b)* £1,000 to £2,000, *(c)* £2,000 to £3,000, *(d)* £3,000 to £5,000, *(e)* £5,000 to £10,000, *(f)* £10,000 to £20,000, *(g)* £20,000 to £40,000, *(h)* £40,000 to £70,000; *(i)* £70,000 to £100,000, *(j)* £100,000 to £200,000, *(k)* £200,000 to £300,000 and (1) over £300,000. [11317]

Mr. Chisholm *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* The information relating to payments made to farmers in Scotland under the 1996 arable area payments scheme is set out in the table:

	Number
(a) £0–£1,000	952
(b) £1,000–£2,000	968
(c) £2,000–£3,000	798
(d) £3,000–£5,000	2,016
(e) £5,000–£10,000	846
(f) £10,000–£20,000	1,523
(g) £20,000–£40,000	1,369
(h) £40,000–£70,000	653
(i) £70,000–£100,000	187
(j) £100,000–£200,000	124
(k) £200,000–£300,000	8
(l) over £300,000	3

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste within his Department. [11554]

Mr. Chisholm: The Scottish Office proposes to set waste minimisation targets throughout the Department once the necessary supporting information is collated and analysed. This action is in hand.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by his Department in each of the last five years. [11555]

Mr. Chisholm: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for his Department. [11553]

Mr. Chisholm: The Scottish Office has recently developed a waste minimisation strategy for its main building at Victoria quay, Edinburgh, as part of an environmental management system. It is planned to introduce similar strategies through existing management structures in all other principal Scottish Office buildings.

Further Education

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to establish a further education funding council; and if he will make a statement; [11213]

(2) if non-certificated courses will continue to be available in further education; and if he will make a statement; [11214]

(3) what plans he has to encourage the use of *(a)* private public partnership, *(b)* private finance initiative and *(c)* derivatives in meeting the capital needs of further education; and how his Department intends to support such initiatives; [11215]

(4) if he will make a statement on his strategy for further education in Scotland. [11216]

Mr. Wilson: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Local Government Elections

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider postponing the third statutory review of local government electoral arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [11217]

Mr. Chisholm: Parliament has required the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland to review the electoral arrangements for all local government areas as soon as practicable after 1 April 1996. The Secretary of State has no power to postpone that review. The Secretary of State will, however, be giving very careful consideration to the proposals which the Local Government Boundary Commission make as a result of that review.

Keelylang Site of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how long negotiations have been continuing between Scottish Natural Heritage and the owner of the land covering the Keelylang site of special scientific interest, Orkney, regarding the conclusion of a management agreement in respect of the site of special scientific interest. [11842]

Mr. Chisholm: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Scottish Parliament

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how he will ensure that legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament is compatible with European Union or other international obligations of the UK. [11808]

Mr. McLeish: The Government's proposals are set out in paragraphs 4.18–4.21 of "Scotland's Parliament"—Cm 3658—in respect of international obligations and in paragraph 5.8 in respect of European Union obligations.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the distinction between the specification of *(a)* devolved and *(b)* reserved powers for the Scottish Parliament. [11810]

Mr. McLeish: In order to ensure maximum clarity and stability, the Government have proposed that the legislation establishing the Scottish Parliament should list the matters to be reserved to the UK Parliament rather than specify devolved matters.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Ponsonby rule will be applied in the Scottish Parliament. [11807]

Mr. McLeish: The Ponsonby rule applies to the ratification of international treaties. Since under the Government's proposals international relations would be reserved to Westminster, the Ponsonby rule would not apply to the business of the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make a statement on the role of the Lord Advocate in respect of advice given to *(a)* the Scottish Parliament and *(b)* the United Kingdom Parliament; [11798]

(2) if he will make a statement on the nature of the Lord Advocate's accountability to the Westminster Parliament following the introduction of a Scottish Parliament; [11799]

(3) if he will make a statement on the role and responsibilities of the Lord Advocate in respect of *(a)* law reform issues, *(b)* the Scottish prosecution service, *(c)* the administration of Scottish criminal matters in England and *(d)* the appointment of judges following the introduction of a Scottish Assembly. [11800]

Mr. McLeish: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

EU Birds Directive

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he proposes to designate new special protection areas, declared under the EU birds directive, to protect *(a)* the hen harrier, *(b)* the golden plover and *(c)* the corncrake; and what percentage of the United

Kingdom breeding population of each of these species is currently protected by special protection areas in Scotland. [11924]

Mr. Chisholm: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funding is presently committed from his departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [11891]

Mr. Donald Dewar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 10 July, *Official Report*, column *546*.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what are the actual or estimated totals for Scottish Natural Heritage's expenditure on the operation of the sites of special scientific interest system in Scotland in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 and *(d)* 1998–99; and what proportion of Scottish Natural Heritage's total expenditure these sums represent; [11843]

(2) what are the actual or estimated totals for Scottish Natural Heritage's expenditure in relation to the designation and protection of sites notified under the birds directive and habitats and species directive in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 and *(d)* 1998–99; and what proportion of Scottish Natural Heritage's total expenditure these sums represent; [11844]

(3) what was the actual or estimated expenditure by Scottish Natural Heritage on its statutorily required nature conservation functions in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 and *(d)* 1998–99. [11923]

Mr. Chisholm: My noble Friend the Minister for Agriculture, the Environment and Fisheries will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussion his Department has had with Scottish Natural Heritage regarding the negotiation of a management agreement in respect of the Keelylang site of special scientific interest in Orkney; and if he will make a statement. [11841]

Mr. Chisholm: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

European Issues

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what mechanism will be used to ensure agreement between United Kingdom and Scottish Executive departments in reaching a common negotiating position on European issues. [11809]

Mr. McLeish: The Government's proposals on the subject are set out in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.6 of the White Paper, "Scotland's Parliament", Cm3658.

Local Agenda 21

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to support Scottish local authority initiatives in respect of local agenda 21; and if he will make a statement. [11845]

Mr. Chisholm: Local agenda 21 is primarily a matter for local authorities to advance. The Scottish Office provides financial support to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to co-ordinate a strategic approach by Scottish local authorities to local agenda 21. My noble Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries in Scotland is meeting COSLA on 3 September to discuss the role of authorities in the promotion of sustainable development. Later this year, he plans to convene a conference on local agenda 21 for councillors and senior local authority staff.

Animal Exports

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what actions his Department is taking to proceed with *(a)* the export certified herds scheme and *(b)* the date-based scheme. [12200]

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm: The Government are pursuing both schemes with the EU Commission with equal vigour. Further clarification is to be provided on the date-based scheme. In line with the Florence agreement, the Commission will be putting both schemes to their scientific advisory committees.

Devolution (Interpretation)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will produce a video version of his proposals for Scottish devolution carrying subtitles and sign language interpretation; [12003]

(2) if he will ensure that all publicly broadcast information in relation to the forthcoming referendum in Scotland carries subtitles and sign language interpretation. [12000]

Mr. McLeish: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Mr. Brendan Callaghan

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress is being made with the review of the case of Mr. Brendan Callaghan; and if he will make a statement. [12102]

Mr. McLeish: We are presently conducting a detailed examination of the papers submitted on behalf of Mr. Callaghan and of other material that has been obtained in order to establish what issues require further investigation before a decision can be reached on his petition. Depending on the results of that examination, the Crown Office will be requested to conduct detailed investigation of the matter at issue.

Planning Applications

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will extend the time allowed for community councils and other community organisations to comment on the proposed changes in the procedures to notify neighbours of planning applications. [12086]

Mr. Chisholm: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

Business Start-up Scheme

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many unemployed people have qualified for assistance under the business start-up scheme in each of the last five years; and what was the annual expenditure. [12170]

Mr. Wilson: I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the House Library.

HEALTH

Nursing Homes (Negligence)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions apply to enable individuals to pursue complaints of negligence against private sector nursing homes; and if he will make a statement. [7702]

Mr. Boateng: Any complaint about a nursing home, including complaints about the competence or negligence of nursing home staff, should be referred to and investigated by the local health authority in its capacity as registering authority of nursing homes under the Registered Homes Act 1984. The health authority will then decide what action to take.

Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to seek to update the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960 in order to *(a)* protect consumers and *(b)* protect clinical titles; and if he will make a statement. [8739]

Mr. Milburn: The Government are committed to bringing forward, for consultation, proposals for legislation to replace the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960. A Bill advisory group is advising the United Kingdom Health Departments on the preparation of instructions on a draft Bill, which will be subject to a wide-ranging consultation process to enable all the issues to be debated.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of employees, in each payband, in the quangos for which his Department is responsible, are of *(a)* Asian origin and *(b)* Afro-Caribbean origin. [8953]

Ms Jowell: The information for all those public bodies which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has responsibility—NHS bodies[1]—health authorities, NHS trusts, special health authorities, executive and advisory[2] non-departmental public bodies and tribunals—has been placed in the Library.

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[1] None of the Advisory NDPBs and tribunals which the Department of Health sponsors employ staff.

[2] Information on NHS bodies also includes two directly managed units—Northfield Services for Pld and Manchester College of Midwifery—whose staff are employed by Health Authorities and two organisations which employ NHS staff, information management centre and FHS computer unit.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a mandatory requirement on all NHS bodies to undertake regular ethnic minority returns of staff. [11281]

Mr. Milburn: National health service employers are already required to return ethnic origin information about their employees to the NHS Executive as part of the Department of Health's annual medical and dental and non-medical work force censuses.

Dental Services

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of national health service dentistry in the Vale of Evesham. [9193]

Mr. Milburn: There are problems with availability of national health service dentistry in the Vale of Evesham. It is the responsibility of health authorities to oversee the provision of NHS dental services in their locality. At the request of Worcestershire health authority, the Secretary of State authorised on 18 July a specific arrangement in Evesham designed to improve the availability of these services. The health authority is also seeking to employ a salaried dentist in Pershore and Kidderminister.

Preston General Hospital

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children from Chorley and South Ribble district were treated at Preston general hospital in the last year for which figures are available. [9856]

Mr. Milburn: The current basic unit for measuring hospital activity is the finished consultant episode. FCEs are not the same as the number of patients treated because a hospital spell can consist of more than one FCE, and patients discharged too early who are subsequently readmitted as emergencies count as another FCE. Furthermore, an FCE count cannot by itself serve as a valid measure of productivity since it is not standardised over time for any changes in the quality of treatment.

In 1993–94, the last year of the Chorley and South Ribble DHA, there were 5,667 such episodes for children aged up to 16 recorded for the acute unit of the former Preston health authority. The total for people of all ages was 28,236.

The former Chorley and South Ribble and West Lancashire district health authorities merged in 1994.

The most recent figures are for 1994–95, when 5,854 episodes for children aged up to 16 from the South Lancashire health authority area were recorded for Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. The total for people of all ages was 28,535.

Source: Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics.

Chemical Support Services

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the oral statement of the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), of 14 July, *Official Report*, column 81, what grades of NHS staff are included under the definition of clinical support services. [9691]

Mr. Milburn: There is no established definition of clinical support services. As part of the review of private finance initiative, officials will be considering what services may be included in PFI projects and are aiming to produce a list of these by the end of the year.

Fluoridation

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the fluoridation of water supplies; and if he will introduce legislation to require water companies to follow the advice of health authorities on this issue. [9814]

Mr. Milburn: We are currently looking at many aspects of public health policy, including water fluoridation.

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the causes of fluorosis in children; what links have been identified between fluorosis and the fluoridation of water supplies; and if he will make a statement. [5965]

Mr. Milburn *[pursuant to his reply, 2 July 1997, c. 174]:* I am now able to provide additional information. The full reply is as follows:

The Department of Health has not itself commissioned any research into causes of fluorosis in children. Extensive research over many decades undertaken independently of the Department has confirmed a link between water fluoridation and dental fluorosis, although at a level of one part per million in temperate climates it is considered to be of negligible importance.

Management Consultants

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1992, in 1997 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what estimate he has made of the quantified annual cost savings achieved by this. [10412]

Ms Jowell: Estimates for expenditure on all external consultants for the Department of Health and its agencies, in 1997 prices, are as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1992–93	24.194
1993–94	20.468
1994–95	21.926
1995–96	21.132
1996–97[1]	15.789

[1] Information for 1996–97 includes a figure of £2.194 million for NHS Regional Offices which were established in 1996–97.

The Department does not hold information centrally on savings which are a direct consequence of external consultants' activity.

Public Appointments

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions since 1 May were first identified by the public appointments unit. [10408]

Ms Jowell: The Department of Health has appointed one individual since 1 May 1997. This appointment was as a direct result of using the public appointments unit.

Non-NHS Staff

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many non-NHS staff have been employed by each health authority in each of the last five years. [10416]

Mr. Milburn: I will write to the hon. Member.

Young People (Care)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young people in local authority care or subject to care orders absconded for more than a week for each local authority in the last three years. [10435]

Mr. Boateng: The figures which are available relate to the number of children looked after by local authorities in England who were recorded as absent from their agreed placement for more than one week. Although this will include children who absconded, it will also include children who were absent for other reasons. Figures for the latest three years available have been placed in the Library. Figures for the year ending 31 March 1996 are not yet available.

Non-urgent Elective Surgery

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average waiting time period specified by each health authority for providers of health services to carry out non-urgent elective surgery in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [10812]

Mr. Milburn: Health authorities contract for maximum, not average, waiting times for elective treatment. In most cases, they do not specify maximum waiting times for non-urgent, as opposed to urgent, elective treatment. Nor do they specify maximum waiting times for surgery as distinct from other in-patient treatment. Contracted maximum waiting times for admission to hospital for 1996–97 and 1997–98 are shown in the table. Where a range of times is shown, this indicates different maximum waiting times for different providers or specialties.

Contracted maximum waiting times

	1996–97	*1997–98*
Anglia and Oxford		
Bedfordshire	12 months	15 months
Berkshire	12 months	12–15 months
Buckinghamshire	12 months	15 months
Cambridge and Huntingdon	12 months	12–15 months
East Norfolk	12 months	12–15 months
Northamptonshire	12 months	12–15 months

Contracted maximum waiting times

	1996–97	*1997–98*
North West Anglia	12 months	12–15 months
Oxfordshire	12 months	12–15 months
Suffolk		
North Thames		
Barking and Havering	12 months	15–18 months
Barnet	12 months	18 months
Brent and Harrow	12 months	18 months
Camden and Islington	12 months	12 months
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	18 months	18 months
East London and The City	12–15 months	6–18 months
East and North Hertfordshire	12 months	12–18 months
Enfield and Haringey	12 months	18 months
Hillingdon	12 months	12 months
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	12 months	6–9 months
North Essex	12 months	18 months
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	18 months	18 months
South Essex	12 months	18 months
West Hertfordshire	12 months	18 months
North West		
Bury and Rochdale	12 months	12 months
East Lancashire	12 months	12 months
Liverpool	12 months	12 months
Manchester	12 months	12 months
Morecambe Bay	12 months	12 months
North Cheshire	12 months	12 months
North West Lancashire	12 months	12 months
Salford and Trafford	12 months	12 months
Sefton	12 months	12 months
St. Helen's and Knowsley	12 months	12 months
South Cheshire	12 months	12 months
South Lancashire	12 months	12 months
Stockport	12 months	12 months
West Pennine	12 months	12 months
Wigan and Bolton	12 months	12 months
Wirral	12 months	12–18 months
Northern and Yorkshire		
Bradford	12 months	12 months
Calderdale and Kirklees	12 months	12 months
County Durham	12 months	12 months
East Riding	12 months	12 months
Gateshead and South Tyneside	12 months	12 months
Leeds	12 months	12 months
Newcastle and North Tyneside	12 months	12 months
North Cumbria	12 months	12 months
Northumberland	12 months	12 months
North Yorkshire	12 months	12 months
Sunderland	12 months	12 months
Tees	12 months	12 months
Wakefield	12 months	12 months
South Thames		
Bexley and Greenwich	12 months	18 months
Bromley	12 months	12 months at most providers
Croydon	12 months	15 months at most providers
East Kent	12 months	12 months at most providers
East Surrey	12 months	9–18 months
East Sussex	12 months	12–18 months
Kingston and Richmond	18 months	18 months
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	18 months	18 months
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	12 months	18 months
West Kent	12 months	15 months at most providers
West Surrey	12 months	18 months at most providers
West Sussex	12 months	18 months
South and West		
Avon	10–15 months	12 months
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	9 months	9 months
Dorset	6 months	6 months
Gloucestershire	9–12 months	9 months
Isle of Wight	10 months	15 months
North and East Devon	12 months	15 months
North and Mid Hampshire	12–18 months	12–18 months
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	6 months	12 months
Somerset	12 months	12 months
Southampton and South West Hampshire	9–14 months	12–15 months
South and West Devon	12 months	9 months
Wiltshire	12 months	12–15 months
Trent		
Barnsley	12–18 months	12–18 months
Doncaster	12–18 months	12–18 months
Leicestershire	12 months	12–18 months
Lincolnshire	12 months	12–18 months
North Derbyshire	12 months	12–18 months
North Nottinghamshire	12 months	12–18 months
Nottingham	12 months	12–18 months
Rotherham	12 months	12–18 months
Sheffield	12–18 months	12–18 months
South Derbyshire	12 months	12–18 months
South Humber	12 months	12-18 months
West Midlands		
Birmingham	9 months	9 months
Coventry	9 months	9 months
Dudley	6 months	6 months (with some specialty variations)
Herefordshire	6 months	9 months
North Staffordshire	9 months	9–15 months
Sandwell	9 months	6–9 months
Shropshire	9 months	9 months
Solihull	9 months	9 months
South Staffordshire	9 months	9–12 months
Walsall	6 months	9 months
Warwickshire	9 months	9 months
Wolverhampton	9 months	9 months
Worcestershire	9 months	9 months

Contraceptive Advice

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to introduce measures to raise the profile of family planning clinics and GP surgeries among older women as a source of contraceptive advice; [11329]

(2) if he will provide figures, by age, of the total numbers and the percentages of the age group of women attending family planning clinics and GP surgeries for contraceptive advice for each year from 1990 to the present. [11327]

Ms Jowell: The Department of Health has published a booklet "Your Health: A Guide to Services for Women". The booklet offers advice and information on a wide range of health issues, including family planning services and contraception. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The contraceptive education service is provided by the Family Planning Association under contract to the Department of Health. The CES aims to raise awareness and understanding among the general public including women of all ages about contraceptive methods and family planning services.

Local health authorities are responsible for providing family planning services that meet the needs of the population they serve. Services should be targeted to meet the needs of particular client groups, especially those among whom the take-up of family planning services is lowest. In meeting local need, commissioners and providers need to ensure that information on the full range of family planning services is readily available.

Information about women attending family planning clinics is contained in the Department's publication "Family Planning Clinic Services, Summary Information for 1995–96, England". Copies have been placed in the Library. Comparable information on women attending GP surgeries is not available.

Prescribed Drugs

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the value of drugs prescribed per general practitioner over the past five years, distinguishing between *(a)* those who have their own dispensing facilities and *(b)* those who use an independent pharmacist. [11232]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is shown in the table.

Net ingredient cost of prescriptions dispensed by (a) dispensing doctors; (b) community pharmacists and appliance contractors; and (c) prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered, 1992 to 1996.

England

	Net Ingredient cost (£ million)				
	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Dispensing doctors	185.0	207.9	226.3	243.7	267.6
Community pharmacist and appliance contractors	2,637.3	2,902.0	3,114.3	3,361.6	3,653.3
Items personally administered by prescribing doctors	34.4	47.7	62.4	73.8	84.9
Overall total	2,856.7	3,157.6	3,403.0	3,679.2	4,005.8

1. The information is from the Prescription Pricing Authority PD1 series of forms.
2. The net ingredient cost is the basic cost before discount and excludes dispensing costs and fees.
3. The figures for dispensing doctors include those items personally administered by dispensing doctors.

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for his Department. [11535]

Mr. Boateng: Waste minimisation is already part of this Department's current energy and environment plans for its buildings, with particular emphasis on paper, a major component of waste.

Facilities for the recycling of paper, cans and laser printer cartridges have been provided in the Department's main buildings for a number of years. Recent initiatives include reducing the amount of paper used and widening the range of recycling facilities to other materials.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by his Department in each of the last five years. [11537]

Mr. Boateng: The Department of Health recycled approximately 120,000 kg of waste paper in London for the 1996–97 year.

Paper comes into the Department from many different sources and not all is currently measured. The proportion of paper sent for recycling cannot therefore be calculated.

Data were not collected for previous years.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste within his Department. [11536]

Mr. Boateng: While recycling facilities have been available for a number of years in the Department's main buildings, volumes of materials sent for recycling have only been recorded since April 1996. Based on very limited data, an initial target was set to recycle 134,000 kg of waste paper in London during 1996–97, of which an estimated 120,000 kg was achieved.

Office Refurbishment

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the refurbishment of ministerial offices in his Department; and what is the estimated cost of the works and date of completion. [11869]

Mr. Milburn: There are no plans to refurbish ministerial offices in the Department, but, as part of a plan to improve working conditions in Richmond house, comfort cooling is being installed throughout the building including three ministerial rooms at a cost of £17,178. The work is likely to be completed by the end of August.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 July, *Official Report,* column *798,* (1) if he will list all the areas of work currently being undertaken by his Department under each heading, broken down by ministerial responsibilities; [11961]

(2) what issues and areas of work to be undertaken are covered by the subjects listed as ministerial responsibilities in his Department; [11960]

(3) if he will make a statement listing for each Minister the *(a)* current areas of work, *(b)* three priority issues that will be dealt with over the next six months in each area and *(c)* relationship between *(a)* and *(b)* and his Department's overall responsibilities, giving such statistical data as are available; [11856]

(4) if he will list for himself and each of his Ministers the issues reflecting his Department's priorities, indicating the timetable by which they will be achieved. [11962]

Mr. Dobson: Later this year, my Department will be publishing White and Green Papers covering various aspects of health policy which will be intended to promote the health of the public and better meet the needs of patients.

Vitamin B6

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those published papers which were considered by the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment and the Food Advisory Committee prior to their recommending a ban on higher dose vitamin B6 supplements. [11587]

Ms Jowell: Higher doses of vitamin B6 have not been banned. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's independent food advisory committee recommended, on the basis of advice from the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment—COT—that the level of vitamin B6 in dietary supplements sold under food law should be limited to 10 mg per daily dose. In addition, on the basis of the COT's advice, the Medicines Control Agency's Committee on Safety of Medicines reviewed vitamin B6 medicinal products and recommended that those vitamin B6 preparations sold on the general sales list—that is, those freely available to the public—should be limited to 10 mg, while those above 10 mg but below 50 mg should be available under the supervision of a pharmacist. Those of 50 mg and above should be available under the supervision of a doctor as prescription-only medicines.

The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment has considered the toxicity of vitamin B6 on two occasions. On the second occasion the COT considered submissions from industry and nutritional therapy/alternative medicine groups. Lists of the scientific papers considered by the committee have been lodged in the Library. The COT considered the totality of the literature on vitamin B6 toxicity, more than 100 papers, and its conclusions were passed to the Food Advisory Committee.

Mr. Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of published papers challenging the validity of the conclusions of studies undertaken by K. Dalton and M. J. T. Dalton in relation to vitamin B6 supplementation. [11588]

Ms Jowell: The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment has considered the toxicity of vitamin B6 on two occasions. The COT's statement, which was published on 4 July 1997, was based on an overall assessment of the scientific literature on this topic, which included papers challenging the conclusions of the paper of Dalton K. and Dalton M. J. T. and also submissions from industry and nutritional therapy-alternative medicine groups. The COT considered the totality of the literature on vitamin B6 toxicity, more than 100 papers, and lists of published papers have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the numbers of women who experience debilitation as a result of pre-menstrual tension; how many such women supplement their diet with higher-dose vitamin B6 supplements; and what research his Department has evaluated on *(a)* adverse reaction and *(b)* deaths in such women in the last 10 years. [11913]

Ms Jowell: The Department of Health has no information on either the numbers of women who experience debilitation as a result of pre-menstrual tension or the total number of women supplementing their diet with high-dose vitamin B6 preparations. Figures for prescribed medicines may be obtained, but the number of women using vitamin B6 products without a prescription is unknown.

In the years 1987 to 1996 the United Kingdom yellow card adverse drug reaction reporting scheme administered by the Medicines Control Agency has received a total of 42 reactions associated with products containing only vitamin B6. Of these, for five women the indication for vitamin B6 was pre-menstrual tension, none of whom received more than 100 mg per day. With the exception of one case of congenital malformation, all recovered.

Adverse reaction data from the UK's yellow card adverse drug reaction reporting scheme are provided voluntarily by doctors, dentists and pharmacists and indirectly by pharmaceutical companies. Adverse drug reaction reports relate to suspected adverse reactions associated with medicinal products. We have no information on the use of vitamin B6 as a food supplement. The inclusion of a reaction on the ADR database is not considered evidence that the medicine caused the reaction. Other factors such as the temporal relationship between medicine and reaction, any concomitant medication and the possibility of underlying disease should also be considered.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he made of the published views of the gynaecology department of St. Thomas's hospital, London, about the effects of vitamin B6 supplementation prior to announcing his ban on such supplements. [11805]

Ms Jowell: Higher doses of vitamin B6 have not been banned. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's independent food advisory committee recommended, on the basis of advice from the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, that the level of vitamin B6 in dietary supplements sold under food law should be limited to 10 mg per daily dose. In addition, on the basis of the COT's advice, the Medicines Control Agency's committee on safety of medicines reviewed vitamin B6 medicinal products and recommended that those vitamin B6 preparations sold on the General Sales List—GSL; that is, those freely available to the public—should be limited to 10 mg, while those above 10 mg but below 50 mg should be available under the supervision of a pharmacist. Those of 50 mg and above should be available under the supervision of a doctor—prescription-only medicines.

The COT has considered the toxicity of vitamin B6 on two occasions. Before the second occasion, representatives of industry and nutritional therapy/alternative medicine groups were asked to submit information giving evidence of the safety of vitamin B6 for consideration. The published views of staff of the gynaecology department of St. Thomas's hospital were assessed by the COT as part of its review of the toxicity of vitamin B6.

Community Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to alter the obligation on local authorities to place 85 per cent. of community care services with private and voluntary sector providers. [12005]

Mr. Boateng: Decisions on the future of the special transitional grant independent sector condition will be made within the context of the Government's overall policies and manifesto commitments.

NHS Estates

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of NHS Estates. [12353]

Mr. Milburn: National Health Service Estates plays a key role in helping the NHS to improve patient care through better use of the estate. The previous Government announced in December 1994 that it planned to privatise the non-core functions of NHS Estates. I have decided that the agency should retain its current status.

Private Finance Initiative

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the private finance initiative schemes that are currently under consideration in the regions covered by the Government offices for the south-east and the south-west which pertain to the health service and are not the subject of the first prioritisation of 3 July 1997. [11362]

Mr. Milburn: Those national health service trust schemes in the regions covered by the Government offices for the south-east and south-west that have outline business case approval and are currently testing for private finance are listed. All schemes listed have a capital value of £1 million or over. Information is not collected centrally on schemes with a capital value below £1 million. The list excludes those major acute private finance initiative schemes that were part of the recent prioritisation exercise.

Region/trust	*Scheme*
South-east	
Chichester Priority Services NHS Trust	Graylingwell reprovision
Crawley Horsham NHS Trust	Patient administration scheme (PAS)
Hastings and Rother NHS Trust	Mental health reprovision
North Downs Community Health NHS Trust	Farnham Hospital development
North Downs Community Health NHS Trust	Aldershot Polyclinic development
Oxleas NHS Trust	Bexley Hospital reprovision
Queen Mary's Sidcup NHS Trust	Endoscopy and day surgery centre
Thanet Healthcare NHS Trust	Private Patient and Post graduate medical centre
North Kent Healthcare NHS Trust	Sheppey Community Hospital
South-west	
Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust	Neurosciences intensive treatment area
Southampton Community Health Services NHS Trust	Lymington Hospital reprovision
Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust	Radiotherapy equipment
Portsmouth Healthcare NHS Trust	Mental health and learning disabilities
North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust	Alton Hospital
Salisbury Health Care NHS Trust	Inpatient mental health
Frenchay Healthcare NHS Trust	Brain Injury rehabilitation unit
Hampshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	Replacement radio scheme
Poole Hospital NHS Trust	Parkstone House residential
Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust	Opthalmic services

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health service private finance initiative agreements *(a)* have been approved and *(b)* are ready to proceed. [11140]

Mr. Milburn: Following the enactment of the National Health Service (Private Finance) Bill which received Royal Assent on 15 July, the private finance initiative scheme at Dartford and Gravesham national health service trust achieved financial close on 30 July. Norfolk and Norwich Healthcare NHS trust has reached agreement to proceed to financial close.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 July, *Official Report*, column *414*, on the private finance initiative, if he will place in the Library copies of each of the business case PFI bid documents for those NHS facilities that were recently listed as approved for further consideration. [10673]

Mr. Milburn: I will write to my hon. Friend.

NHS Trusts (Private Activities)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what procedures will be placed upon NHS trust private activities to ensure *(a)* that the income they generate is used for the benefit of the NHS and *(b)* that they do not interfere with the provision of health services to the community; [11141]

(2) by what means his Department monitors compliance with directions to NHS trusts in respect of the limits on their private activities; and what steps are taken in the event of non-compliance. [11142]

Mr. Milburn: Procedures are already in place. The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 states that private practice must not interfere with the performance by a trust of any of its obligations under NHS contracts. Health authorities and general practitioner fundholders, backed up by regional offices of the Department, monitor the performance of trusts against contracts. Trusts are required to recover the costs of their private patient activity including an appropriate return on capital employed. Memorandum trading accounts are prepared and audited. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State retains powers to give directions to a trust about the exercise of their powers to provide accommodation or services to private patients and the trust has a duty to comply.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 July, *Official Report*, column *212*, if he will make a statement on the term adverse operating variance. [11925]

Mr. Milburn: In line with generally accepted accounting practice, a National Health Service trust makes a charge against its income and expenditure account for the depreciation of its assets.

The prices a trust charges to its purchasers includes the depreciation charge, but changes in the value of a trust's assets may occur too late for the resulting change in depreciation to be reflected in the prices charged to purchasers.

Increases in depreciation will result in an increase in expenditure which is not matched by an increase in income from the trust's purchasers. In these circumstances, the trust may show a deficit in the income and expenditure account. This is not within the control of the trust's management; nor is it an indicator of financial problems. The operating variance is used to calculate the underlying financial position of the trust by adjusting its income and expenditure account for changes in depreciation caused by late changes in the trust's assets.

Where the variance is adverse, the underlying position will be investigated further.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the criteria that each NHS executive regional office uses to determine which health trusts and authorities are judged to have serious financial problems. [7759]

Mr. Milburn *[pursuant to his reply, 16 July 1997, c. 212]:* I am now able to provide additional information. The full reply is as follows:

The National Health Service Executive assesses the seriousness of financial problems by initially looking at the scale of the financial problem reported—that is, over £1 million deficit or, if lower, a deficit of 1 per cent. of turnover in health authorities; and adverse operating variance of either £0.5 million or, if lower, of 0.5 per cent. of turnover in trusts. The NHS executive will supplement this with an assessment of additional factors such as the robustness of recovery plans.

Prostate Cancer

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into prostate cancer; and if he will make a statement. [11934]

Mr. Boateng: The national health service research and development programme's health technology assessment programme has undertaken two studies into prostate cancer. These are:

a systematic review of detection, management and screening for prostatic carcinoma, at a cost of approximately £54,000;

a review of evidence on the cost-effectiveness of different strategies for detecting and managing prostatic carcinoma, at an approximate cost of £13,000.

These two studies have recently reported.

The next round of priorities for the HTA programme have been set and one of these is treatments for the spectrum of prostate cancers likely to be identified by a screening programme.

The Department's policy research programme is currently undertaking a systematic review of minimally invasive therapy for benign prostatic hyperplasia and cancer. The study is being undertaken at the university of Newcastle between 1 August 1996 and 31 July 1997 at a total estimated cost of £39,491.

Another study, a mortality study of cadmium exposed workers with particular reference to lung and prostatic cancer, was completed last year and has reported. The study was undertaken at Imperial college between 1 October 1994 and 31 May 1996 at a total cost of £32,070.

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department has spent in the last year for which figures are available on the treatment and cure of prostate cancer. [11935]

Mr. Boateng: Expenditure on prostate cancer cannot be identified separately. Expenditure on cancer services generally is estimated to account for approximately 7 per cent. of national health service resources.

Breast Screening

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend routine breast screening to those over 65 years. [11609]

Mr. Boateng: Three pilot schemes are currently under way in Northern and Yorkshire, Trent and South Thames regions to evaluate the effectiveness of extending the routine call-recall breast screening programme to women up to the age of 69. These schemes will run for three years to enable an assessment of the likely uptake, effect on work load, and effectiveness in terms of cancer detected. We will base any change to current policy on the evidence from the results of these studies, which should be available from the end of 2000.

In the interim, women aged 65 and over can continue to be screened every three years free of charge on request. This has been publicised in leaflets available in general practitioners' surgeries and clinics, as well as in breast screening centres, and emphasised more recently by a leaflet and poster campaign jointly organised by the charity Age Concern and the breast screening programme.

Specialist Training Certificate

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 24 July, *Official Report*, column 729, how many of the doctors awaiting decisions on their applications for the certificate of completion of specialist training *(a)* are at present working in the NHS, *(b)* have previously worked in the NHS, *(c)* were trained at UK medical schools, *(d)* are at present employed as consultants in the NHS and *(e)* have waited more than three months for accreditation. [11711]

Mr. Milburn: The Specialist Training Authority currently has no outstanding applications from doctors who have been recommended for the award of a certificate of completion of specialist training by the medical royal colleges. Information on the status of applicants is a matter for the STA and is not held centrally.

Alternative Practitioners

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met representatives of alternative and complementary medical practitioners; what was discussed; and if he will make a statement. [11933]

Ms Jowell: I met representatives of the Faculty of Homoeopathy on 21 July. Their thoughts on the future of homoeopathy were discussed.

On 23 July, the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I also met representatives of various organisations, including nutritional therapy interests, to listen to their views on the intended changes to the legislation controlling vitamin B6 contained in dietary supplements.

I plan to meet the Council for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, and other organisations representing alternative and complementary medical practitioners, later in the year.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding is presently committed from his departmental budget for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [11893]

Ms Jowell: The Department is committed to having all business critical systems fully year 2000 compliant by the central information technology unit recommended deadline and the costs of preventive and remedial action will be met from existing public expenditure survey provision. A detailed and costed action plan will be available in the autumn.

GP Fundholders (Anglia and Oxford)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GP fundholders there are within the Anglia and Oxford health authority region by county. [11728]

Mr. Milburn: General practitioner fundholder numbers are not collected by county. The number of GP fundholders by health authority in the Anglia and Oxford region as at 1 April 1997 is set out in the table.

Anglia and Oxford region fundholder numbers (Waves 1–7)—1 April 1997

Health authority	*Total number of funds*	*Total number of practices*	*Total number of general practitioner fundholders*
Bedfordshire	26	26	100
Berkshire	55	73	291
Buckinghamshire	56	63	270
Cambridge and Huntingdon	16	16	72
East Norfolk	36	39	187
Northamptonshire	36	38	167
North West Anglia	25	31	124
Oxfordshire	40	44	209
Suffolk	27	27	
Total	317	357	1,567

Efficiency Task Force

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 July, *Official Report*, column 580, when he expects the NHS efficiency task force first to put forward its ideas to Ministers and officials. [11939]

Mr. Milburn: The ideas of task force members have been received and are under consideration.

Patients (NHS Hospitals)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been treated in NHS hospitals for each year since 1979. [10910]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The information in the table shows numbers of finished consultant episodes. FCEs are not the same as the number of patients treated because a hospital spell can consist of more than one FCE, and patients discharged too early who are subsequently readmitted as emergencies count as another FCE. Furthermore, an FCE count cannot by itself serve as a valid measure of productivity since it is not standardised over time for any changes in the quality of treatment.

Table: Number of general and acute cases in NHS hospitals in England for each year since 1979

Thousands

Year	*Ordinary admissions*	*Day cases*	*Total FCEs*
1979	4,529	570	5,099
1980	4,755	649	5,404
1981	4,875	690	5,565
1982	4,830	685	5,515
1983	5,113	787	5,900
1984	5,246	872	6,118
1985	5,385	938	6,323
1986	5,429	1,020	6,449
1987–88	5,608	861	6,469
1988–89	5,572	1,005	6,577
1989–90	5,677	1,152	6,829
1990–91	5,685	1,251	6,936
1991–92	5,913	1,535	7,448
1992–93	5,987	1,785	7,772
1993–94	6,127	2,080	8,207
1994–95	6,210	2,439	8,649
1995–96	6,396	2,813	9,209

Note: Prior to 1988–89 in-patient data were collected in terms of discharges and deaths rather than Finished Consultant Episodes. The figures above have been converted to FCEs using data from 1988–89, when data were collected on both bases.

Source:

SH3 1979 to 1987.

KP70 1987–88 onwards.

NHS Staff

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* fully qualified nurses and *(b)* doctors were employed in the NHS in each year since 1979. [10909]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The information requested is in the following table.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS) and General Medical Services (GMS) medical staff and qualified nursing and midwifery staff

England as at 30 September each year

Year	*HCHS hospital medical staff*[1] *Headcount*	*WTE*	*HCHS community medical staff* *Headcount*	*WTE*	*GMS General Medical Practitioners*[2] *Headcount*	*GMS practice nurses WTE*	*HCHS qualified nursing and midwifery staff WTE*
1979	39,860	32,130	5,890	2,790	23,060	990	192,000[4]
1980	40,760	33,200	5,980	2,820	23,670	1,070	212,500[4]
1981	41,620	33,940	6,040	2,880	24,360	1,240	212,100
1982	42,190	34,500	6,170	2,870	24,840	1,450	219,300
1983	42,760	35,160	6,330	2,910	25,340	1,660	223,310
1984	42,780	35,370	6,160	2,880	25,790	1,920	227,720
1985	43,550	35,970	6,150	2,930	26,190	2,210	234,130
1986	43,990	36,310	6,030	2,920	26,530	2,500	236,770
1987	43,960	36,250	6,300	2,760	27,020	2,770	239,360
1988	45,490	37,600	6,160	2,790	27,420	3,480	241,780
1989	46,970	38,910	6,110	2,770	27,750	4,630	244,610
1990	48,590	40,250	5,900	2,730	27,520	7,740	242,340
1991	49,900	41,430	5,320	2,780	27,890	8,780	243,250
1992	50,380	42,290	4,940	2,600	28,180	9,120	246,570
1993	51,550	43,800	4,710	2,590	28,460	9,600	241,850
1994	52,040	44,660	4,070	2,370	28,740	9,100	238,780
1995	55,350	47,870	3,920	2,300	28,870	9,740	246,820[3]
1996	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—	28,940	9,820	248,070[3]

Notes:

[1] Figures for hospital medical staff include hospital practitioners and clinical assistants who may also be General Medical Practitioners.

[2] General Medical Practitioners include: restricted principals, unrestricted principals, trainees and assistants.

[3] 1995 and 1996 figures for HCHS nursing and midwifery staff are not directly comparable with figures for earlier years because of a change in the way non-medical staff were classified from 1995.

[4] Figures for 1979 and 1980 are not comparable with those for later years because of a reduction in nurses standard working hours in 1980–81 from 40 to 37.5 hours per week.

[5] Not available.

All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

WTE indicates whole-time equivalents. WTE figures for GMPs are not available.

Sources:

Department of Health's: annual medical and dental workforce census; annual non-medical workforce census; and bi-annual census of General Medical Practitioners.

NHS Staff (Patient Care)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS staff provided direct patient care in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1996. [10900]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave him on 22 July at column *736.*

Estimates for national health service staff, which comprise hospital and community health services and general medical services as a whole, are not available before 1990.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department has collated in respect of individual trusts' plans for hospital waiting times. [10421]

Mr. Milburn *[pursuant to his reply, 29 July 1997, c. 124]:* I am now able to provide additional information. The full reply is as follows:

Information is not collated by the Department on individual trust's plans for hospital waiting times. The Government have inherited a situation where 44 of 100 health authorities have contracted for longer maximum waiting times in 1997–98 than in 1996–97. Whereas only four have contracted for shorter maximum waiting times. The Government have made clear the priority that they attach to waiting lists, and to safeguarding emergency admissions.

School Nursing Service

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's future plans for the development of the school nursing service in London. [9176]

Mr. Milburn: The Government are currently considering all health services for school-age children within the context of the response to the Health Select Committee report on children's services.

Child Sex Abuse (Recovered Memories Report)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Royal College of Psychiatrists over its decision not to publish the report by Professor Sydney Brandon into recovered memories of child sexual abuse; and if he will make a statement. [11145]

Ms Jowell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not had any discussions with the Royal College of Psychiatrists about the report of its working party on recovered memory chaired by Professor Sydney Brandon. The question whether it publishes his report is a matter for the royal college.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Livingtstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work has been carried out by the Public Health Laboratory Service since 1990 to evaluate the health effects of the organism E. coli MRE 162; for what reasons and on whose behalf this work was conducted; when this work was conducted; what was the conclusion of the work; and in which publications, and when, this work was published. [12189]

Ms Jowell: The Public Health Laboratory Service's laboratory of enteric pathogens received E. coli MRE 162 from the chemical and biological defence establishment at Porton Down in March 1997. There was a request from CBDE to evaluate the organism with respect to the risk posed to human health.

The organism was fully identified as E. coli serotype 08:H9 and tested for a wide range of enteric virulence factors. All tests were negative and it was concluded that the strain was unlikely to cause diarrhoeal disease. A report was sent to CBDE on 22 April 1997. The work carried out has not been published in scientific journals.

Health Action Zones

Mr. Rammell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role county, district and borough councils will have in planning and implementing health action zones. [12094]

Mr. Milburn: To set up and run a health action zone, a wide range of interests including local authorities will have to work in close partnership. We shall publish further details in due course.

Neonatal Injury

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps his Department is taking to eliminate the damage caused by (i) Erb's palsy and (ii) brachial plexus injuries during the birth process; [2885]

(2) if he will list the incidence of *(a)* Erb's palsy and *(b)* brachial plexus injuries over the past 20 years. [2886]

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he plans to take to raise national awareness of Erb's palsy. [2878]

106. **Mr. Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a programme *(a)* for the recording of every incidence of (i) Erb's palsy and (ii) brachial plexus injuries and *(b)* to raise the general awareness about Erb's palsy. [2930]

Ms Jowell *[pursuant to her reply, 12 June 1997, c. 528–29]:* I am now able to provide additional information. The full reply is as follows:

We are of course concerned about the damage to babies caused by Erb's palsy and brachial plexus injuries during birth. The safety of the mother and her unborn child are of paramount importance and childbirth is safer now than at any other time. Most cases of Erb's palsy and brachial plexus injuries arise spontaneously, but are also considered to be influenced by misplacement of the shoulders in the birth canal. In recognition of this problem, a working group under the auspices of the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy, is currently preparing guidance on the management of shoulder dystocia—difficulty in delivering the shoulders during the birth. The guidance will provide advice on the early identification of cases where there may be a risk on coping with cases where shoulders dystocia occurs. The guidance is expected to be available later this year.

Information on the number of finished consultant episodes of those patients admitted to hospital with primary diagnosis Erb's palsy and brachial plexus injuries in NHS hospitals in England up to 1994–95 is available through hospital episode statistics data and is shown in the table. The definition of a consultant episode is the period that a patient spends under the continuous care of a specific consultant in a specific health care provider. A hospital provider spell can comprise one or more consultant episodes. However, episode statistics will therefore pick up cases where the diagnosis was not made at birth and the baby was subsequently readmitted. Information before 1989–90 recorded discharges and deaths and is therefore not directly comparable to hospital episode statistics data.

Primary diagnosis—of Erb's palsy (ICD9 code 767.6) and brachial plexus injuries (ICD9 code 953.4)

Estimated number of Finished Consultant Episodes (FCEs),

Ordinary admissions and day cases combined NHS hospitals, England.

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Erb's palsy/Klumpke's palsy	142	158	202	240	370	330
Injury to brachial plexus	337	191	181	149	135	148

Notes:

ICD9 code 767.6: Injury to brachial plexus (birth trauma)—Erbs palsy and Klumpke's palsy combined.

ICD9 code 953.4: Injury to brachial plexus.

Data in this table are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.

Source:

Department of Health, hospital episode statistics.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Advance Corporation Tax Credit

21. **Mr. Fabricant**: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the impact on the cash flow of small businesses of the Budget changes to ACT tax credit. [10046]

Mrs. Roche: The changes to ACT tax credit are part of a package of measures designed to create a better environment for growth and high-quality, long-term investment. Taking account of the cut in the small companies' corporation tax rate, and of increased first-year plant and machinery allowances for small and medium businesses, the small firms sector as a whole will receive a significant boost from the Chancellor's Budget.

Inward Investment

22. **Mr, Olner:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further steps her Department intends to take to promote inward investment in the United Kingdom. [10047]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My Department's Invest in Britain Bureau will continue to promote the attractions of the UK for mobile international investment to consolidate our position as the No. 1 location in Europe for inward investment. The Government will pursue economic policies which enhance those attractions, including macro-economic stability, an increase in the skills base, "flexibility plus" in labour markets and a positive approach to Europe.

Mr. David Heath: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the number of foreign-owned companies, by country, which have established operations in the United Kingdom. [11210]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* According to information notified to my Department's Invest In Britain Bureau, the numbers of new projects by country of origin between 1979 and to date, are as follows:

	Number
Australia	24
Austria	4
Belgium	16
Brazil	1
Canada	69
Denmark	33
Finland	19
France	65
Germany	285
Hong Kong	21
Iceland	1
India	4
Indonesia	1
Isle of Man	1
Israel	6
Italy	16
Japan	174
Kenya	2
Korea (South)	30
Liechenstein	1
Malysia	1
Middle East	1
Netherlands	34
New Zealand	5
Norway	29
Portugal	2
Republic of Ireland	51
Saudi Arabia	3
Singapore	6
South Africa	8
Spain	10
Sweden	42
Switzerland	42
Taiwan	24
Thailand	2
Turkey	3
Uruguay	1
United States	765

1. These figures are based on information on new projects provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest and exclude expansions and mergers or acquisitions. There is no requirement to notify the Department and so the figures include only those projects where IBB and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice. They take no account of subsequent developments.

2. Data collected from 1977 onwards—when IBB was established.

Coalfield Areas

23. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions she has had with coalfield representatives and local authorities regarding industrial development in the coalfield areas. [10048]

Mr. Battle: My colleagues and I have frequent discussions with those representing coalfield interests on a wide range of issues, including regeneration.

Deregulation

24. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to make use of the deregulation procedures established by the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. [10049]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I intend to use the deregulation order-making power to reduce or simplify the burdens imposed in two cases. These are:

the repeal of the check-off system of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992; and

an amendment to the Patents Act 1977 to allow the filing fees for patent applications to be paid later than the filing date

Further proposals for use of the power are under consideration.

Child Labour

26. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals she has to control imports of goods produced by child labour. [10051]

Mrs. Roche: We are firmly committed to eliminating abusive labour practices, particularly child labour, around the world. We fully support initiatives to improve the welfare of children, including a new International Labour Organisation convention on child labour, and are increasing our financial support for international programmes working towards this end. We have also begun to discuss with business, unions and other organisations what further initiatives the Government might take, but we must ensure that these would not harm the very people we are trying to help.

Utility Regulation

27. **Mr. Shepherd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to announce the conclusions of her review of utility regulation. [10052]

Mrs. Beckett: The review team will advise Ministers before the end of the year. If the Government conclude that changes should be contemplated, a consultation document will be published. Final conclusions will be announced as soon as practicable.

Small Businesses (Information Technology)

28. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her Department's policy towards improving access to information technology for small and medium businesses. [10053]

Mrs. Roche: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies I gave today to my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) and for Stourbridge, (Ms Shipley).

Ms Shipley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her Department's policy towards improving access to information technology for small and medium businesses. [10039]

Mrs. Roche: Many recent studies have emphasised the crucial importance of new technologies to the competitiveness of smaller firms. Many people—in government, in business support organisations and in the private sector—have a role in getting this message across. Within government, we are pressing ahead with our support for the information society initiative programme for business, which places particular emphasis on offering access and awareness opportunities for SMEs at locations throughout the UK.

Defence Exports

29. **Mr. Greenway:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures her Department is taking to support defence-related exports. [10054]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Ministry of Defence's export services organisation leads the Government effort on supporting defence-related exports. My Department maintains a close dialogue with the industry on the whole range of issues affecting competitiveness. The full range of Export Credits Guarantee Department's facilities are available for defence as well as for civil-related exports.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what arms and defence-related materials have been licensed for export by the United Kingdom to *(a)* Burundi, *(b)* Djibouti, *(c)* Eritrea, *(d)* Ethiopia, *(e)* Kenya, *(f)* Rwanda *(g)* Somalia, *(h)* Sudan, *(i)* Uganda and *(j)* Zaire in the period since 1990. [8998]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 23 July 1997]:* I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of that letter in the Library.

Mr. Howard: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what contracts permitted by the previous Government she intends to prohibit in accordance with the criteria set out in the answer of the Foreign Secretary to the hon. Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms) of 28 July, *Official Report,* columns *26-29.* [11887]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the right hon. and learned Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs today.

Mr. Faber: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list, by year, those arms exports for which her Department has refused an export licence since 1987. [11058]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* I will write to the hon. Member shortly and place a copy in the Library of House.

India

30. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to develop Britain's trading relationship with India. [10055]

Mrs. Beckett: I have already made clear my strong commitment to strengthening the Indo-British partnership. A major trade exhibition—Towards 2000—is being held in October this year at the time of the state visit of HM the Queen and HRH the Duke of Edinburgh. I will be visiting India myself later in the year. A promotional campaign is also planned in the UK to raise awareness of the opportunities in India among small to medium companies. I am confident that this activity will contribute significantly to meeting the target of £5 billion that has been set for two-way trade by 2000.

Low Pay Commission

31. **Mr. Cann:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects the Low Pay Commission to start its work. [10056]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Appointments to the Low Pay Commission were made by the Prime Minister and announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 25 July columns *808–09,* in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Mr. Johnson). The commission held its first meeting on Monday 28 July.

Telecommunications

32. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions she has had with the cable industry on its investment programme and possible changes in the restrictions on BT. [10057]

Mrs. Roche: I met representatives of the cable industry on 23 June this year, and was briefed on a range of issues including the cable industry's investment plans. My officials also maintain regular and productive contact.

Internet Access

33. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to stimulate the development of Internet access services in the UK. [10058]

Mrs. Roche: The Department of Trade and Industry is fully committed to the development of the information society in the UK and is enthusiastically pushing forward the "Information Society Initiative—Programme for Business" which encourages the informed uptake of networked services by British business. The DTI will also be developing an enterprise zone. This will be an Internet-based service for small and medium companies, providing a "one stop access point" to key information and to sources of further support for SMEs. The Government are also working internationally to secure the right conditions for fostering the optimal use of the Internet through work on security, intellectual property rights and self-regulation, the latter based on existing law and the existing penalties. The market in the Uk is itself expanding very fast, with many active Internet service providers allowing users access to a wide variety of contents and applications.

World Trade Organisation

35. **Mr. Rammell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the proposal for a human rights clause in the treaty relating to the World Trade Organisation. [10061]

Mrs. Beckett: The Government are firmly committed to ending abusive labour practices around the world. We are already pursuing this objective in the ILO and through other international forums. We are also exploring how work can be taken forward in the WTO. We see no conflict between our commitment to promote free trade and fight protectionism on the other hand and our determination to see abusive labour practices eliminated on the other.

Women Directors

36. **Mrs. Ballard:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many women are *(a)* executive and *(b)* non-executive directors on plc boards. [10062]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Institute of Management's latest national management salary survey shows that women now represent 4.5 per cent. of directors on company boards, up from 3.3 per cent. last year.

Manufacturing Trade

38. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the change in the level of manufacturing trade over the next 12 months. [10064]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: In the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" published on 2 July 1997, the Chancellor of the Exchequer forecast the volume of manufactured exports to grow by 7.5 per cent. in 1997 and by a further 6 per cent. in 1998.

North-east Lancashire (Investment)

39. Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she is taking to promote inward investment into north-east Lancashire; and if she will make a statement. [10065]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My Department's Invest in Britain Bureau promotes the whole of the UK as the No. 1 location in Europe for overseas inward investors. In 1997–98, it will provide £1,393,000 to promote inward investment into the whole of the north-west region, including north-east Lancashire. It will also continue to offer the region the opportunity to bid for any new projects where it can meet investors' needs.

Utilities (Standing Charges)

Mr. Touhig: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received from consumer organisations about standing charges made by utilities. [10035]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Although my right hon. Friend has not received formal representations from consumer organisations, a number of hon. Members have conveyed the concerns of some of their constituents about this issue.

Konver Grants

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the allocation of Konver grants. [10059]

Mr. Battle: The UK secured the Commission's agreement to spend up to 50 per cent. of Konver funds in areas falling outside objective 1, 2 and 5b areas. This enabled us to spend Konver funds in both objectives areas and non-objective areas.

Appointments

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many political and personal appointments she has made; and at what cost to public funds. [1117]

Mrs. Beckett: I have appointed two paid advisers—Sheila Watson and Dan Corry. They are both paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,848. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and of previous salaries are not provided, in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

I have also appointed Lord Hollick as an unpaid adviser.

Utilities (Consumer Protection)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to conduct a review of consumer representation and protection in the utility industries. [4397]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: On 30 June, the President of the Board of Trade announced an interdepartmental review of utility regulation. The important issues of consumer representation and protection to which my hon. Friend refers will be covered in this review.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many tonnes of spent oxide nuclear fuel have been *(a)* sheared and dissolved and *(b)* reprocessed to the thermal oxide reprocessing plant since (i) March 1994 and (ii) March 1997. [6550]

Mr. Battle: Since the thermal oxide reprocessing plant began operations in March 1994, some 680 tonnes of fuel have been sheared and dissolved to the year end, March 1997, the latest date for which figures are available. THORP remains on target to process 7,000 tonnes of fuel in its first 10 years of operation and to make at least £500 million profit for this period after decommissioning costs have been taken into account. Shearing and dissolving are an integral part of reprocessing.

International Port, Aden

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what facilities and advice are available to United Kingdom companies wishing to participate in the privatisation and development of Yemen's international port at Aden. [11291]

Mrs. Roche: Within the DTI, the Yemen country desk and the section in projects export promotion directorate with responsibility for ports actively monitor this project and alert UK companies with expertise in this sector to the business opportunities it presents.

The country desk, in conjunction with the British embassy in Yemen, has already organised a seminar on board Britannia, while it was in Aden in February, for British companies interested in the opportunities offered by the port development. Forthcoming opportunities include a DTI-supported trade mission led by HRH the Duke of Gloucester in September and October, another DTI-supported trade mission in February 1998, and a

DTI-supported all-British trade fair in Sana'a in November 1997. The country desk and export promoter for Yemen are also organising a seminar on investment finance for Yemen in the UK in September 1997 with speakers from Yeminvest and the World bank.

The country desk will continue to work closely with the commercial section in the British embassy, Sana'a, including the second secretary, commercial, a new post that has been created to respond to the increase in commercial opportunities in Yemen, and in particular those offered by the developments in Aden.

Official Travel (Cost)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total cost to her Department of the trips made by the Minister and officials to *(a)* Antwerp on 24 June and *(b)* Athens on 25 to 28 June. [9432]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 18 July 1997]:* Before 1 May, a decision for officials to attend the International Travel Services Association Antwerp conference was taken. The total cost to the Department of the visit to Antwerp was £37,038.00. The DTI provided two stands at the ITSA conference which were staffed by a total of five officials; three other officials attended the conference as full delegates; I was accompanied by my private secretary. The total cost to the Department of the visit to the UK industry travel and tour conference in Athens was £3,238.00. I undertook a number of official engagements, meeting 20 UK exporters to Greece; and meetings with Greek Ministers.

Indonesia

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) of 11 July, *Official Report*, columns *646–47*, if she will list *(a)* the dates on which export licences for the export of Hawk aircraft to Indonesia were issued, *(b)* the number of aircraft specified in those licences, *(c)* the time during which the licences were intended to remain in force, *(d)* the branch of the Indonesian military or paramilitary forces specified as an end user and *(e)* whether (i) the licences distinguished between the trainer or ground attack variant of the aircraft and (ii) the licences specified the weapon systems or weapon system fittings which were to be supplied with the aircraft. [9589]

Mrs. Roche: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of that letter in the Library of the House. Inquiries are being made as regards the release of the information under the non-statutory code of practice on access to Government information and, since confidential information is involved, the consent of the company is being sought for the disclosure of the information.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the benefit to the United Kingdom to date of the 1994 GATT agreement to liberalise world trade. [11236]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* Work undertaken by the GATT secretariat suggests that, over the long term, the agreement on trade in goods alone could boost the real income of the EU as a whole by around 1.7 per cent. per annum. By 2005, this could amount to around $160 billion per annum for the EU. No separate estimates are available for the UK.

Employment Contracts

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if she will make a statement on her Department's policy in relation to the use of waiver clauses in employment contracts; [10593]

(2) what plans she has to review the operation of section 142 of the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 in respect of the use of waiver clauses in employment contracts; and if she will make a statement. [10592]

Mrs. Beckett: The Government expect to consult on proposals for fairness at work later this year. We will consider the issue of waiver clauses in this context.

Export Licences

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to reach a decision on export licence application number 530904; and if she will make a statement. [10619]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* The licence was issued on 29 July 1997.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 21 July, *Official Report*, columns *452–53*, concerning Manroy Engineering, how her officials were informed by the company that the Manroy L80 Manpack mist sprayer did not go into production; and how the information was verified. [12204]

Mrs. Roche: When my hon. Friend asked her previous question, the company was contacted by telephone by an official of the export control organisation of my Department. The company advised that it had not entered into production of the equipment in question and I am not aware of any reason to doubt that advice.

Waste Minimisation

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to introduce a waste minimisation strategy for her Department. [11550]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The DTI, as part of the environment management strategy and good housekeeping, has already adopted a number of measures to minimise waste management, including:

Energy efficiency—to reduce the overall consumption of the Department over a three-year period on the baseline figure of 1995–96.

Waste paper—to increase the waste paper sent by the Department for recycling from 30 to 75 per cent. of paper purchased before the end of 1998;

Ink/toner cartridges and cans—to recycle all spent cartridges and drink cans.

The strategy is of a proactive waste management with the continued emphasis on minimisation of waste that would need to be sent to landfill sites.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the amount, and proportion, of paper recycled by her Department in each of the last five years. [11552]

Mr. Griffiths: The figures are available only from July 1996. In that period, the Department sent around 77 tonnes of paper for recycling. This represents 30 per cent. of the paper purchased by the Department. It is the aim of the Department to increase this to 75 per cent. before the end of 1998.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on existing targets set to minimise waste within her Department. [11551]

Mr. Griffiths: The targets set by the Department to minimise waste are:

Energy efficiency—to achieve a 5 per cent., or better, reduction in energy consumption over a three-year period on the base figure of 1995–96.

Waste paper—to increase the waste paper sent for recycling from 30 to 75 per cent. of the paper purchased before the end of 1998;

Ink/toner cartridges and cans—to recycle all spent cartridges and drink cans.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what is *(a)* remit and *(b)* time scale of the Government's review of renewable energy policies; [11455]

(2) which civil servants are dealing with her Department's review of renewable energy; [11457]

(3) which *(a)* Government Departments and *(b)* other organisations her Department is consulting in its review of renewable energy policies; [11456]

(4) how and when information from her Department's review of renewable energy policies will be made publicly available. [11458]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* I have established an interdepartmental review group, led by my director of the energy technologies directorate of the DTI, to report in the autumn on new and renewable energy policy options. The review will consider what would be necessary and practicable to achieve 10 per cent. of the UK's electricity needs from renewables by 2010 and how renewables can make an effective contribution to meeting requirements for future gas reduction commitments.

I am consulting colleagues in other Government Departments with interest in renewables, including the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices; the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Treasury. The review will provide an input to the comprehensive spending review and the UK's climate change programme. I will consider wider consultations with the renewable trade industry trade bodies and other interested bodies in the autumn in the light of options resulting from the review.

The outcome of the review will be published in 1998.

Technology-based Small Firms

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the responses to the Bank of England's report of October 1996 on the financing of technology-based small firms. [11786]

Mrs. Roche: The Government have welcomed the Bank of England report as a very useful contribution to pinpointing the issues associated with the financing of technology-based small firms. The Government are discussing with the Bank of England the recommendations for action in the report, taking account of the various responses to the report received by the bank.

Civil Service Pension Scheme

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the terms of reference of the competing for quality review of her Department's use of the principal civil service pension scheme; what is the time scale of the review; what consultation process is planned in respect of it; and if she will make a statement on the proposals for *(a)* any market testing and *(b)* contracting out this service. [10585]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* The DTI has no plans to conduct a competing for quality review of its principal civil service pension scheme administration at this stage. There are therefore no proposals at present to market test or contract out this work.

Retail Newsagents

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what representations she has received from retail newsagents on difficulties being faced due to unregulated competition; [10635]

(2) what proposals she has for regulation of the newspaper retail supply trade; [10636]

(3) what plans he has to introduce amendments to the Restrictive Trade Practices Acts in respect of retail newsagents. [10637]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* My right hon. Friend and I have received a number of representations from retail newsagents on the state of the newspaper distribution industry. I met Roger Clarke of the National Federation of Retail Newsagents on 22 July.

The Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for considering allegations of anti-competitive behaviour, abuse of monopoly power and restrictive trade practices. He is considering the most recent submission from the National Federation of Retail Newsagents, the main representative body for independent newsagents, arguing for the newspaper distribution industry to be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

The Government have no plans to regulate the newspaper retail supply trade, or to amend the Restrictive Trade Practices Acts specifically in respect of retail newsagents. Nor do we expect our proposals for the forthcoming Competition Bill to contain measures specifically in respect of retail newsagents.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if her forthcoming competition legislation will include measures to address the competitive position of independent newsagents. [11311]

Mr. Griffiths *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* The competition Bill will introduce a prohibition of anti-competitive agreements and a prohibition of abuse of a dominant market position. These are measures to improve the effectiveness of competition law across the economy as a whole, rather than being targeted on individual sectors.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the situation facing independent newsagents. [11310]

Mr. Griffiths *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 21 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *446–47*.

Copywatch

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what relationship the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs has with Copywatch. [12173]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: None.

Mr. Page: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice the company Copywatch has provided to her Department; and what advice from the company she has accepted. [12174]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the president of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the advice provided by the company Copywatch to the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs. [12197]

Mr. Grifffiths: A report was submitted on 18 June from Copywatch. I have placed the Department's response in the Library of the House.

Employment Pacts

Ms Beverley Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which proposed territorial employment pacts the Government intend to nominate to the European Commission as pilot projects in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [12469]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The European Commission said in its interim progress report on the implementation of territorial pacts for employment that it expected 10 proposals from the United Kingdom to add to the 78 proposals from other parts of the European Union. The Government received 66 proposals from all parts of the UK and, following regional prioritisation, I have selected the proposals put forward by:

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough;

Birmingham City Council on behalf of Black Country Districts, Birmingham and Solihull;

Borough of St. Helens;

East Midlands 3-Cities (Nottingham, Derby and Leicester);

London Borough of Haringey/North London Leadership (Tottenham Partnership);

Northern Ireland Training and Employment Agency;

North Wales Economic Forum;

South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council;

West Cornwall Initiative; and

Western Scotland Objective 2 partnership.

Although the Commission only invited the UK to nominate 10 pilot projects, the Government would also welcome similar pacts and local partnerships in other areas which could have a significant local impact and which could provide useful information and experience.

Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe

Mr. Letwin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the topics which have been addressed by the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe within her Department since 1 July. [11641]

Mrs. Beckett: I refer the hon. Member to the list of ministerial responsibilities, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe has held discussions with the gas regulator since 1 May. [11644]

Mrs. Beckett: None.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe will be involved in meetings related to the review of utility regulatory regimes being carried out by her Department. [11643]

Mrs. Beckett: Within the DTI, the Minister for Science, Energy and Industry leads on this review. The Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe will continue to deal with issues which fall within his portfolio of ministerial responsibilities, subject to the arrangements in place to ensure that no conflicts of interest can arise.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe will continue to answer questions in another place on the review of utility regulatory regimes being carried out by her Department. [11642]

Mrs. Beckett: The Minister will continue to answer questions on a range of DTI issues in another place.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who are the trustees of the blind trust established by the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe; and what instructions they have been given for the management of the portfolio. [11795]

Mrs. Beckett: The Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe has made arrangements for his non-BP shareholdings to be placed in a blind trust in accordance with the guidance in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". Further details of these arrangements are a private matter for the Minister.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) of 23 July, *Official Report*, column *665*, (1) what procedures exist to ensure compliance with "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" by the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe; and what mechanisms are in place to ensure that, from the date of his appointment, he has not seen any papers or attended any meetings formally or informally, which would have or would have had, a bearing on BP or its competitors; [11968]

(2) which Minister or civil servant takes the decision on whether a conflict of interests arises in respect of the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe. [11975]

Mrs. Beckett: The Minister decided at the outset that he would not be involved in discussions or decisions directly affecting BP, and civil servants dealing with issues falling within his ministerial responsibilities have acted accordingly since then. The Minister's private office has, in addition, ensured that he does not see papers or attend meetings that directly affect BP. In cases of doubt, the Minister and civil servants consult the permanent secretary for advice.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what dates and at what venues the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe's recent meetings or parties with BP personnel were held. [11633]

Mrs. Beckett: The Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe met directors of BP on 9 May, 4 June and 4 July, at BP's offices in Finsbury circus and in a restaurant. The Minister also attended farewell social engagements hosted by BP on 4 June, 25 June and 3 July in a marquee at Finsbury square, at the Barbican and in Manchester square.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe has now complied in full with paragraphs 109, 110, 111, 112 and 117 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". [11632]

Mrs. Beckett: The Minister has complied with the guidance in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" in full since the day of his appointment.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether she took legal advice prior to the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe signing the explanatory memorandum on European Community document on gas liberalisation to ensure that the Government would not be open to legal challenge. [11634]

Mrs. Beckett: The Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe has not signed any such memorandum; the gas liberalisation dossier is the responsibility of my hon. Friend the Minister for Science, Industry and Energy.

Minister of Competition and Consumer Affairs

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) of 24 July, *Official Report*, column *732*, where in Athens, and when, the social event took place, at which the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs met Mr. Haji-Iannou. [11920]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: At Vouliagmeni at 10am on 26 June.

Mrs. May: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the articles contributed to "Travel Weekly" by the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, together with their publication dates since 5 May 1997. [11901]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Two articles were submitted after 5 May: one appeared on 21 May. The second appeared on 25 June. An article submitted before my appointment as Minister appeared on 7 May.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she first heard and from whom that the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs was stepping down from the consideration of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigation of the travel trade. [9950]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 21 July 1997]:* My hon. Friend the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs communicated his decision to me via official channels at the earliest practical opportunity after he had made his decision.

Competition Law

Gillian Merron: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on competition law reform. [12470]

Mrs. Beckett: I will shortly be publishing a consultation document and draft Bill which is intended to introduce a tougher competition regime. The Bill will introduce a prohibition approach to anti-competitive agreements, cartels and abuse of a dominant position similar to articles 85 and 86 of the treaty of Rome. There will be fines for breach of the prohibitions and rights for customers and competitors to seek compensation in the courts.

In addition, I am planning to establish a new body, a competition commission, which will take on the existing functions of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and will also hear appeals against the decisions of the Director General of Fair Trading under the prohibition regime.

Commercial Debt

Mr. Öpik: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on her plans to improve the ability of small businesses to obtain money owed to them. [11915]

Mrs. Roche: Small businesses play a fundamental part in the economy of the UK. The Government are concerned therefore by any actions that unnecessarily hinder their competitiveness. The late payment of commercial debt is acknowledged by many in the business community to be a serious problem, particularly for small businesses which are least able to bear the additional costs resulting from payment delays. The Government are determined therefore to improve the payment culture in the UK.

The Government are pursuing a package of measures in partnership with business organisations.

The Government will introduce a statutory right to claim interest on late payment of commercial debt. Legislation will be transparent, so that all businesses are clear about their rights and obligations. A Green Paper, "Improving the Payment Culture: A Statutory Right to Claim Interest on Late Payment of Commercial Debt" was published on 28 July.

The Lord Chancellor announced, in June of this year, that, as part of the review of existing proposals for the reform of the civil justice system, consultation would proceed on proposed fast-track and multi-track procedures which will ensure realistic timetables and reduce the cost, delay and complexity of civil litigation.

The Government will publish league tables of the payment performance of Government Departments and agencies. They are working with others to produce league tables on the payment performance of public limited companies and their large private subsidiaries. The first set of tables is expected in summer 1998.

I am delighted to say that a number of leading business representative organisations have pledged to join the Government in tackling the problem of late payment. They include the British chambers of commerce, the Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Forum of Private Business, the Institute of Directors, the Union of Independent Companies, the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union. Over the next 12 months, we will work with them and others on a number of initiatives to tackle late payments and meet the needs of small businesses.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimates she has made of the cost of publishing league tables of payment performance of plcs and their subsidiaries. [11733]

Mrs. Roche: The Government are committed to working in partnership with the private sector to publish league tables of the payment performance of public limited companies and their large private subsidiaries.

The Companies Acts already require plcs and their large private subsidiaries to state the average time to pay their suppliers and to publish this figure annually in their director's report. The Federation of Small Businesses has offered to collate and publish this information in a league table format. These tables will provide small businesses with information on how quickly they can expect to be paid when dealing with larger business, at no cost to the public purse.

The publication of league tables is another important step in promoting a more ethical payment culture in the UK.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the closing date for representations on the consultation paper, "Improving the Payment Culture." [11730]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 22 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *507*.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the organisations and individuals who have been sent the consultation paper, "Improving the Payment Culture." [11729]

Mrs. Roche: To date, some 3,500 copies of the Green Paper "Improving the Payment Culture: A Statutory Right to Claim Interest on Late Payment of Commercial Debt" have been sent to organisations and individuals. Recipients include individual businesses, trade associations, legal, accountancy and financial bodies, business representative organisations, business links, training and enterprise councils, chambers of commerce, local authorities and NHS trusts.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Pond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list in domestic currency the statutory national minimum wage, or the lowest minimum wage established on the basis of legally binding sectoral or industry agreements, in each European Union state and in the United States of America, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Canada; and if she will list the equivalent of each of these amounts as an hourly rate in pounds sterling *(a)* on the basis of current exchange rages and *(b)* at purchasing power parity exchange rates. [12214]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The information requested about wages is not routinely collected by my Department; all the latest figures available to me are set out in the table below.

Country	*Minimum wage in national currency*	*Hourly rate[3] in Sterling at*	
		Current exchange rate[1]	*PPP exchange rate[2]*
Belgium	44165 BFr Monthly	4.20	4.76
Canada	C$5 Hourly	2.17	2.75
France	6406 FFr Monthly	3.75	3.94
Greece	5746 Dr Daily	1.52	2.19
Japan	Y 4969 Daily	3.19	2.43
Luxembourg	46275 LFr Monthly	4.25	4.53
Netherlands	2244 Fl Monthly	3.96	4.44
New Zealand	NZ$6.25 Hourly	2.45	2.78
Portugal	58883 Es Monthly	1.09	1.80
Spain	2279 Pta Daily	1.19	1.62
USA	$4.75 Hourly	2.85	3.19

[1] Current Rates as at 25 July 1996.

[2] PPP exchange rates for 1996 from OECD Main Economic Indicators July 1997.

[3] Converted to hourly rates using results from the European Labour Force Survey 1995 published by Eurostat, except Japan were results from ILO "Conditions of Work Digest" are used.

Employees' Rights

Mr. Stunell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures she proposes to transfer the legal responsibility enforcing terms and conditions of employment from employees to employers; and if she will make a statement. [11092]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Generally, terms and conditions of employment are a matter for agreement between employer and employee. Where one party breaches the contract, it is for the other party to seek enforcement.

Direct Rail Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the trial train service being run by BNFL's Direct Rail Services subsidiary from Penrith to Cricklewood receives public subsidy. [11783]

Mr. Battle: This service does not receive any public subsidy. Operational details are a matter for Direct Rail Services.

Security Equipment

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how information given to her officials by manufacturers and suppliers of military, security and police equipment is *(a)* verified and *(b)* evaluated; and if she will place copies of the evaluation and verification procedures in the Library. [12203]

Mrs. Roche: The way in which officials verify and evaluate such information depends on the nature of the information requested. In some circumstances, we do verify information provided by applicants for export licences, for example the intended end-user, but in others we do not, for example where a company states that it has not produced a particular item of equipment and there is no reason to doubt that statement.

Holocaust Victims (Funds)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps her Department has taken to investigate claims that the British Government failed to return confiscated funds deposited by victims of the holocaust in British banks; and if she will make a statement. [11284]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Government take very seriously the concerns expressed in the Israeli Knesset and in the media about the confiscation of property from nationals and residents of enemy countries during the second world war. The DTI is working closely with the FCO to identify the relevant papers—many of which are already at the Public Record Office. The results of that work will be made public when it is completed. Both Departments are also co-operating with the Holocaust Educational Trust and other interested individuals and organisations.

Fuel Agreement

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many beneficiaries of the national concessionary fuel agreement there are, broken down by those in receipt of *(a)* coal, *(b)* smokeless fuel and *(c)* cash in lieu of fuel. [11988]

Mr. Battle: At June 1997, the breakdown of national concessionary fuel agreement beneficiaries—that is, not including British Association of Colliery Management beneficiaries—under my Department's liability was as follows: *(a)* 14,477 in receipt of coal; *(b)* 88,977 in receipt of smokeless fuel; *(c)* 63,242 in receipt of cash in lieu of fuel.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many concessionary fuel beneficiaries have a statutory entitlement which pre-dates the national concessionary fuel agreement. [11989]

Mr. Battle: At 7 July 1997, there were 793 beneficiaries receiving concessionary fuel under statutory entitlement—that is, under the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946.

Coal Production

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total United Kingdom coal production for the last complete year for which figures are available; and how much was *(a)* opencast coal and *(b)* deep-mined coal. [11986]

Mr. Battle: Coal production in the United Kingdom in 1996 is set out in the table.

	Thousand tonnes
Total production[1]	50,197
Of which:	
Deep-mined	32,223
Opencast	16,315

Note:

[1] Total production for 1996 comprises deep-mined, opencast and other production. Other production of 1,658,000 tonnes is an estimate for slurry and so on recovered from dumps, ponds, rivers.

Source:

Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics.

Opencast Coal

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of opencast coal mined in the United Kingdom for the last complete year in which figures are available was *(a)* used for sweetening purposes and *(b)* went to the power station market. [11987]

Mr. Battle: Of 16,315,000 tonnes of total opencast production in 1996, over half went to the power stations market. The proportion of opencast coal used in the United Kingdom for sweetening purposes is not available.

Radio Advertising (Wealth Warnings)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will remove the requirement for wealth warnings on radio advertising. [11621]

Mrs. Beckett: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) on 29 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *223*.

Information Society

Lorna Fitzsimons: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she is taking to monitor and assess the United Kingdom's progress towards the information society relative to other countries. [12467]

Mrs. Roche: The Department of Trade and Industry commissioned Spectrum Strategy Consultants, as part of the information society initiative, to undertake primary research to assess the UK's progress towards the information society. The aims of the research were to measure levels of ownership and usage of information technology, electronics and communications products by both companies and consumers in the UK, US, Germany, France and Japan. In addition, the study compares attitudes and levels of awareness, and analyses drivers and barriers to change. This builds on a pilot benchmarking study undertaken for DTI in 1996, the publication of which was announced on 25 October 1996 in a written answer to the hon. Member for Bournmouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) *Official Report*, column *16*.

The latest study, entitled "Moving into the Information Society—An International Benchmarking Study" will be published on 4 August and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House. Further copies are available by calling the ISI business infoline on 0345 15 2000, by e-mailing info@isi.gov.uk, or through the ISI website at http://www.isi.gov.uk/isi/mitis.htm.

Advisers

Mr. Flight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade pursuant to her answer to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) of 24 July, *Official Report,* column *733,* if she has placed any restrictions on her Department's Ministers having outside advisers additional to those listed in her answer. [12251]

Mrs. Beckett: Additional special advisers to DTI Ministers would need my agreement and that of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 24 July, *Official Report,* column *733,* on advisers, which director of Copywatch has now been appointed an adviser to the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs; and if she will make a statement. [12212]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I am not aware of such claims.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Gale: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to make internal guidance manuals relating to regional selective assistance available to local authorities and potential inward investors. [12017]

Mrs. Roche: I have no plans to make the internal regional selective assistance guidelines available to local authorities and potential inward investors. The guidelines provide detailed advice for officials operating the scheme and cover sensitive aspects of appraisal and monitoring.

The RSA brochure, which is freely available from Govnerment offices and business links, provides details about the scheme and guidance on how to apply for grants.

Power Stations

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will provide a list of outstanding applications under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for the building of combined-cycle gas turbine power stations currently under consideration by her Department; when she expects each application to be determined; and if she will make a statement. [11608]

Mr. Battle: Applications for combined-cycle gas turbine power stations at the following locations are currently under consideration:

Baglan Bay, Port Talbot (1,200 megawatts)
Capenhurst, Cheshire (65 MW)
Carrington, Greater Manchester (380 MW)
Croydon (80 MW)
Elland, Halifax (56 MW)
Ellesmere Port, Cheshire (65 MW)
Enderby, Leicester (1,125 MW)
Fawley, Hampshire (130 MW)
Great Yarmouth (350 MW)
King's Lynn Phase II, Norfolk (820 MW)
Newcastle (350 MW)
Port Talbot (200 MW)
Rosgoch, Isle of Anglesey (880 MW)
Runcorn, Cheshire (140 MW)
Saltend, Hull (1,200 MW)
Sandbach, Cheshire (58 MW)
Shotton Paper Mill, North Wales (240 MW)
Snodland Paper Mill, Kent (60 MW)
Spalding, Lincolnshire (800 MW)
Swansea (185 MW).

Each application is considered on its merits and I cannot therefore say when the decision on each application will be taken.

Directors and Company Secretaries (Report)

Mr. Healy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many responses she has received to the consultative document, "Disclosure of Directors' and Company Secretaries' particulars"; and when she expects to publish the Government's conclusions. [10935]

Mr. Ian McCartney: To date, my Department has received just over 250 responses. I expect the Government's conclusions to be published later this year.

Teaching Company Scheme

Mr. Stringer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will respond to the recommendations of the panel which carried out the 1996 quinquennial review of the teaching company scheme; and if she will make a statement. [12468]

Mr. Battle: The report of the 1996 quinquennial review panel of TCS, under the chairmanship of Sir Robin Nicholson, chairman of Pilkington Optronics and former chief scientific adviser to the Government, was submitted in October 1996. Since then, the five Departments of State and four research council which funded TCS at that time have been actively considering the findings of the review panel and its many recommendations.

This review has shown that with a Government investment of £1 million TCS produces net benefits of 58 jobs, £3.6 million worth of value added, £3 million worth of exports, and £13.3 million of additional turnover, as well as increases in research and development expenditure, in participating companies. These are substantial achievements by any standards.

Following the recommendations of the review panel, the Government have decided to extend the scope of TCS to enable organisations in the science, engineering and technology base as well as universities to participate with effect from 1 September 1997. This will allow our firms to make full use of the technological skills and experience that are available throughout the country.

Copies of Sir Robin's report and the Government response are being placed today in the Libraries of both Houses.

Sickness Dismissals

Mr. Stunell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many dismissals on the grounds of sickness have been notified to her Department in each year from 1987. [11089]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Department is not notified of individual dismissals.

Unfair Dismissals

Mr. Stunell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to reduce the qualifying period for eligibility to pursue a case for unfair dismissal; and if she will make a statement. [11090]

Mr. McCartney: The Government have no plans to change the qualifying period for unfair dismissal. The House of Lords has referred to the European Court of Justice questions relating to whether the qualifying period for unfair dismissal is indirectly discriminatory against women. However, the Government are committed to providing fair minimum standards for people at work and expects to consult on proposals for fairness at work later this year.

Civil Servants

Mr. Woodward: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many civil servants are working in each Minister's private office; and how many civil servants in which offices have transferred out of private offices since 1 May. [11940]

Mrs. Beckett: The number of civil servants working in DTI Ministers' offices is not materially different from the number which worked there under the previous Government. Movement of staff in and out of Ministers' offices continues, as it did before 1 May.

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the outcome of her review of her Department's policy towards tackling the problem of the failure of the majority of computer systems to recognise the year 2000. [12022]

Mrs. Roche: I am working closely with Taskforce 2000 on the serious problem facing businesses large and small. Many businesses are aware of the problem, but too few are taking action with the necessary urgency. We are shifting the emphasis of the campaign from general awareness to stimulating action, through many channels of communications, including financial auditors, banks and supply chains. We will be looking at progress in key sectors of the economy, and consulting on what more needs to be done.

On 22 July, I hosted the millennium information technology skills summit, which addressed the growing shortage of skills, which will be aggravated by the century date problem. I have asked participants to bring forward proposals for new initiatives and to make a report to me in September.

37. **Mr. Colman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action is being taken by her Department in respect of the millennium compliance of computers. [10063]

Mrs. Roche: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West, (Mr. Singh).

Investment Agreement

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the multilateral agreement on investment on the Government's plans for corporate taxation, with particular reference to the windfall tax on privatised utilities. [12248]

Mrs. Roche: We do not expect that the multilateral agreement on investment will impact on the Government's plans for corporate taxation, including the windfall tax on privatised utilities.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the multilateral agreement on investment on Her Majesty's Government's ability *(a)* to restrict foreign investment in sensitive sectors and *(b)* to discriminate in favour of high value-added investments. [12246]

Mrs. Roche: The multilateral agreement on investment will provide for sectoral restrictions on foreign investment. These restrictions must be notified in advance. The UK's list is short, reflecting the liberal approach we take to foreign investment. We would not expect the multilateral agreement on investment to impair the UK's ability to attract high value-added investments.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment her Department has made of the likely impact of the multilateral agreement on investment on the British Government's existing obligations in relation to health, environmental and labour regulations. [12249]

Mrs. Roche: The multilateral agreement on investment is essentially about the non-discriminatory application of regulations as between foreign and domestic investors. Since the UK regulations are generally applied in a non-discriminatory way, they will not be undermined by the agreement.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the multilateral agreement on investment on the Government's ability to promote local community development programmes through *(a)* laws requiring banks to invest in economically deprived areas, *(b)* development funds marked for local businesses, *(c)* tax breaks for local companies and *(d)* other measures. [12247]

Mrs. Roche: The multilateral agreement on investment should not conflict with local community development programmes.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the multilateral agreement on investment on the Government's ability to ensure that transnational corporations receiving public funds in assisted areas are required to meet specific performance objectives. [12245]

Mrs. Roche: The multilateral agreement on investment's rules on performance requirements are still under negotiation. The Government's approach is to ensure that such rules are consistent with regional development policies so that it would remain possible to obtain certain commitments as a condition for receiving public funds.

Correspondence

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade pursuant to her oral answer to the right hon. Member for Wokingham, (Mr. Redwood), *Official Report*, 3 July, column *406*, when she *(a)* wrote and (b) dispatched the letter to the right hon. Member. [7409]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 9 July 1997]:* The letter was written on Friday 4 July and was faxed to the right hon. Gentleman's home on Saturday 5 July.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Easington, dated 23 May, concerning the surplus in the mineworkers' pension scheme. [8650]

Mr. Battle: I replied to my hon. Friend on 15 July 1997.

Written Answers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham will receive a substantive answer to each question for which she has received a holding reply. [11836]

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Member has received substantive answers, including this one, to the 70 questions that she has tabled since 14 May.

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total cost to public funds of answering the written questions tabled by the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) to her Department in the current Session. [12471]

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) has to date tabled 70 questions to my Department. This has cost at least £7,490, using the average cost of answering written questions, *Official Report*, 4 December 1996, column *656*.

Ministerial Duties

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which Ministers will be attending their departmental offices during August; and if she will list the Minister in charge of the Department for each week of the summer adjournment. [10455]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 25 July 1997]:* Apart from any holiday they may be taking, all my Ministers will be working during August and attending their DTI offices as necessary for the conduct of business. Ministers will continue to exercise their own responsibilities, although a duty Minister will also cover each day for his or her colleagues as necessary. It follows, therefore, that the ministerial responsibilities of the DTI will be adequately covered during this period.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 27 October 1997

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Dome

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister without Portfolio how long the millennium dome will remain in place. [12597]

Mr. Mandelson: The millennium experience dome will have a greatly enhanced lifespan following the decision to use PTFE-coated glass fibre for the roof. The Government are now considering its potential long-term uses.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister without Portfolio (1) what representations he has received about the use of PVC in the millennium dome; [12737]

(2) what additives the PVC coating of the millennium dome will contain. [12739]

(3) what discussions have taken place with the European Commission about the use of PVC for the coating of the millennium dome; [12598]

(4) what evidence he has evaluated on PVC as an environmentally suitable material for use in coating the millennium dome; [12596]

(5) what examination has been carried out of the restrictions on the use of PVC in other European countries; [12595]

(6) where the PVC coating of the millennium dome will be manufactured. [12738]

Mr. Mandelson: On 22 August 1997, the New Millennium Experience Company—NMEC—announced its decision to change the roofing material of the Millennium Experience dome from PVC–coated polyester to PTFE–coated glass fibre. The reason for the change was to give the dome a greatly enhanced lifespan, thereby assisting delivery of the Government's aim to ensure an enduring legacy from the millennium experience. The extra longevity and durability of the dome's roof covering as a result of the change to PTFE–coated glass fibre will increase significantly the legacy options which can be considered.

As part of its earlier considerations about PVC–coated polyester, the NMEC required a full environmental review, taking account of all available information in the UK, Europe and elsewhere, of the material's manufacture and disposal. The NMEC was satisfied that the material met all UK and EU environmental requirements. The company had no discussions with the European Commission but did receive representations about the use and safety of PCV from members of the public, from environmental groups including Greenpeace, and from companies involved in the chemical industry. PTFE–coated glass fibre, which is widely used across the world on large tensile roof structures, does not contain plasticising additives and also meets all UK and EU environmental requirements.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will assess the implications for the legal system of the United Kingdom of ratification of the treaty of Amsterdam, with particular reference to likely changes in court and legal procedures. [12812]

Mr. Hoon: Ratification of the Treaty of Amsterdam will not affect court procedures in the United Kingdom. Under the treaty, civil judicial co-operation is transferred to the Community pillar, but it will not involve the United Kingdom unless we specifically choose to opt into a particular measure or measures.

European Human Rights Convention

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the effect on *(a)* legal precedents, *(b)* procedures and *(c)* the operation of the common law in the United Kingdom of (i) the adoption of the European convention on human rights by the Parliament of the United Kingdom and (ii) the coming into force of the treaty of Amsterdam; and if he will make a statement. [12839]

Mr. Hoon: I have set out our proposals on the incorporation of the European convention on human rights into United Kingdom law in the White Paper, "Rights Brought Home," published on 24 October. The White Paper explains the provisions of the Human Rights Bill introduced in another place on 23 October. As regards the treaty of Amsterdam, I refer the hon. Member to my answer to question No. 198N, UIN 12812.

Gazumping

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action he is taking to combat gazumping. [12495]

Mr. Hoon: A number of Government Departments are co-operating closely to investigate the whole of the house buying process. My own Department is concentrating on the problem of gazumping with the help of the various institutions whose members provide professional services in the housing market. The various strands of work are being co-ordinated by a ministerial working group comprising Ms Hilary Armstrong, Minister for Local Government Housing, Mr. Nigel Griffiths, Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, myself as Chairman and key officials from our Departments.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Tourism

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the *(a)* total number of people employed in the United Kingdom tourism industry and *(b)* financial contribution to the United Kingdom economy of the tourism industry. [12525]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The latest available figures show that there are around 1.7 million people employed in tourism-related industries in Great Britain. The revenue generated by tourism in the United Kingdom is estimated to be £40 billion for 1996. This is equivalent to approximately 5 per cent. of gross domestic product.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans his Department has to develop a strategy for further development of the United Kingdom tourism industry. [12519]

Mr. Clarke: The Government believe that the further development of tourism can best be achieved by working in full partnership with the industry, local authorities, tourist boards and others. On 10 October we therefore announced an expanded role for the Tourism Forum and the creation of a new forum working group on strategic planning.

Television Reception (Wales)

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the number of households in Wales which can receive *(a)* HTV, *(b)* BBC Wales transmissions and *(c)* both. [12548]

Mr. Fisher: Responsibility for the transmission arrangements for television services in the United Kingdom rest with the BBC and the Independent Television Commission. I have been advised that, at present, 98.3 per cent. of the population of Wales has access to television signals from a Welsh transmitter, an English transmitter, or both, which constitute a technically adequate service according to the technical standards agreed by the broadcasters. A total of 96.8 per cent. of the population of Wales can receive HTV, 97.2 per cent. BBC1 Wales and 96.8 per cent. can receive both services.

Tennis Clubs

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what estimate he has made of the number of voluntary-managed tennis clubs in England and Wales; [12708]

(2) what estimate he has made of the percentage of voluntary-managed tennis clubs in England and Wales which are tenants of *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* private landowners and *(c)* public companies. [12709]

Mr. Banks: My Department has made no estimate of the number of voluntary-managed tennis clubs in England and Wales or the type of tenure they might have. However, I am pleased that the Lawn Tennis Association is carrying out a comprehensive survey which should address these issues. The results will be available next year.

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which his Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12565]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has purchased the Integra Accounting package from GC McKeown Ltd. to perform the processing of payments for goods and services.

The work to process the payments is undertaken by the Department with some functions outsourced to CSL Managed Services Ltd. It has no co-operative arrangements with other Departments. The Department orders the goods and services, certifies the invoices and enters the information into the computer system. CSL arranges for payment either by payable order, banker's automated clearing service or clearing house automated payment service on behalf of the Department. The cost of implementing the new system during 1996–97 was £112,609 including the cost of some sub-contractors, whilst the cost of the work performed by CSL during 1996–97 was £101,850.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which his Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12563]

Dr. David Clark: For this purpose, I have responsibility for the Cabinet Office, including the Prime Minister's Office and the Office of Public Service and its agencies, and the Central Office of Information.

In my Department the functions relating to the payment of goods and services are generally performed by integrated accounting services supplied either by a bureau or by in-house development, using either bespoke or package accounting software.

During the year ending March 1997 the functions of the Cabinet Office, core OPS and the Civil Service College were supplied by the Chessington computer centre. Other arrangements were as follows:

Agency		
COI	software package	Computer Associates
SAFE	software package	Tetra
GCDA	software package	arrangement with SAFE
CCTA	software package	Systems Union
TBA	bespoke system	supported by the Unisys
PACE	bureau service	supplied by the DOE

Although there were no specific sub-contractual arrangements the COI system is run on hardware supplied and maintained by Hewlett Packard and SAFE has a similar contract with Connectivity Plus. CCTA has a maintenance contract with Touchstone Computers and a management arrangement with Chessington Computer Services.

The total costs of these systems and services during the year ending March 1997 was £334,093, excluding VAT. However, the Cabinet Office, core OPS and the Civil

Service College have now replaced the Chessington bureaux service with new package software supplied by Systems Union.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the number and proportion of *(a)* Asians and *(b)* Afro-Caribbeans in each grade in the civil service. [11103]

Dr. David Clark *[pursuant to his reply, 30 July 1997, c. 314-15.]:* Information on the ethnic origin of civil servants is collected using a voluntary, self-classification, confidential questionnaire. The number and proportion of Asian and Afro-Caribbean civil servants, by grade equivalents, who have submitted a questionnaire, as at 1 April 1996, is set out in the table.

Staff in post at 1 April 1996 grade level by ethnic origin

Grade level	*Afro-Caribbean*	*Per cent. Caribbean*	*Afro-Asian*	*Per cent. Asian*	*Total respondents*
SCS (1 to 5)	13	0.34	43	1.13	3,819
6	18	0.42	91	2.10	4,325
7	82	0.55	216	1.45	14,906
SEO	68	0.33	263	1.28	20,500
HEO	553	0.84	736	1.12	65,839
EO	1,494	1.54	2,280	2.35	96,929
AO	4,275	2.97	5,873	4.08	144,099
AA	2,212	3.47	2,684	4.20	63,837
Other	5	0.33	8	0.53	1,505
Summary information	8,720	2.10	12,194	2.93	415,759

1. Percentages refer to total respondents in grade.
2. Source MANDATE/Departmental returns.
3. MANDATE is the Office of Public Service's database of information about civil service personnel.

It. covers most Government Departments and agencies, those not included in MANDATE are required to complete a manual return for the information.

4. The figures include both non-industrial and industrial staff.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Drugs Tsar

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Council how many names were selected as a result of the first sift of applicants for the position of drugs tsar. [12932]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The recruitment and assessment service performed an initial sift of all 202 applications for the post of UK anti-drugs co-ordinator. This resulted in the identification of 57 particularly strong candidates. Ministers considered these applications very carefully before interviewing the seven strongest candidates.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Council how many individuals applied for the post of drugs tsar, broken down by main occupational category of applicant. [12931]

Mrs. Taylor: A total of 202 applications for the post of UK anti-drugs co-ordinator were received from a very diverse range of candidates by the deadline of 5 September. A breakdown by occupational category cannot be provided without disproportionate cost.

TREASURY

VAT

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the *(a)* procedure and *(b)* financial effect of VAT base capping in respect of the United Kingdom's contribution to the European Union general budget for 1998. [12283]

Mrs. Liddell: VAT capping was first introduced for the EC budget in 1988, at a rate of 55 per cent. of 1 per cent. of each member state's gross national product. Under the current own resources decision the VAT capping rate is being reduced progressively from 55 per cent. in 1994 to 50 per cent. in 1999. The 50 per cent. rate has applied to Greece, Spain, Ireland and Portugal since 1995. The VAT capping arrangements are broadly neutral for the UK because any change resulting from the application of the capping mechanism is offset a year in arrears by an equal but opposite change to our abatement.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what legislation he plans to introduce for the implementation of value added tax at the point of origin for intra-European Union imports and exports; [12532]

(2) what proposals he has relating to trans-European Union harmonisation of VAT. [12485]

Dawn Primarolo: None. The current EC VAT system, with tax accruing in the member state of consumption for intra-Community transactions, remains in force in the absence of unanimous agreement to change it. The European Commission has yet to produce legislative proposals for changes to the current system, and so discussions on the merits or otherwise of a move to an origin-based system have not even begun. The Government, while supportive of efforts to simplify and modernise the current EC VAT system, is opposed to further unnecessary harmonisation at the Community level.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the system of value added taxation in relation to cereal bars, morning bars, and similar products; and if he will make a statement. [12543]

Dawn Primarolo: Cereal bars and similar products, other than cakes, are liable to VAT at the standard rate. I have no plans to change their taxation.

EU Budget

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the correction of budgetary imbalances as experienced in the preliminary draft European Union budget for 1998, and its effect on the United Kingdom contribution to the European Union budget. [12511]

Mrs. Liddell: The sterling value of the United Kingdom (UK) abatement contained in the 1998 preliminary draft budget—2,066 mecu—will be determined by the pound/ecu exchange rate which applies at the end of this calendar year. If the rate were to remain at the level it was at on 30 September—£1 = 1.4501 ecu—the reduction to the UK's contribution due to the abatement would be £1,425 million in 1998.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the actual and projected European Union budgets for *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99; what are the gross and net contributions from the United Kingdom (i) in sterling, (ii) in ecus and (iii) as a percentage of all national contributions in each year; and if he will make a statement. [12290]

Mrs. Liddell: The European Community budgets on a calendar year basis.

The table sets out the information requested in respect of the United Kingdom's gross contribution before abatement for the calendar years 1996, 1997 and 1998.

	1996	*1997*	*1998*
Total contributions by Member States	72,160 mecu	77,372 mecu	82,313 mecu
UK gross contribution, before abatement,	11,000 mecu	11,332 mecu	13,631 mecu
and percentage of total contributions	15.25 per cent.	14,65 per cent.	16.56 per cent.
UK gross contribution, before abatement, (sterling)	£8,825 million	£8,355 million	£9,400 million

Sources:

Figures for total contributions and UK gross contribution before abatement (mecu) taken from: 1996 Supplementary and Amending Budget; 1997 draft Supplementary and Amending Budget: 1998 Draft Budget. The sterling equivalent of the UK figures have been derived by converting at the following exchange rates:

1996 £1 = 1.2467 ecu; 1997 £ = 1.3564 ecu; 1998 £ = 1.4501 ecu.

The UK's net contribution for 1996, expressed in sterling and based on the cash transactions which took place during the year, was £2,352 million. The current estimate on the same basis for 1997 is £1,342 million. These net contribution figures include adjustments and corrections made in respect of our VAT and GNP-based contributions, of our abatement and of Community spending for earlier years. The figures are thus not directly comparable to the gross revenue raised in respect of particular Community budgets.

As is usual, the Government will provide an estimate of the net contribution for the Community budgetary year 1998 in the annual White Paper "Statement on the Community Budget", once the Budget for that year has been adopted and when the revenue and spending requirements for the year are known.

The figures in the table and the amounts for the net contribution demonstrate the wide fluctuation to which the UK's contributions to the EC budget are subject. These fluctuations are principally due to a range of technical factors such as the timing of our payments and receipts, adjustments and corrections to our contributions in earlier years, exchange rate movements and changes and corrections in the value of the UK's abatement.

Single European Currency

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will commission studies on the impact of a single currency on the number and variety of wholesale trade and retail enterprises in the United Kingdom. [12528]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government have established a business advisory group to consider the practical implications of economic and monetary union for businesses, whether or not the United Kingdom were to join the single currency. A wide range of organisations, including those representing shops and small firms, are represented on the advisory group and working parties reporting to it.

Sterling Coinage

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his Department's proposals for dealing with sterling coinage going out of circulation over the next five years. [12518]

Mrs. Liddell: The 50p piece, introduced in October 1969, is the only coin which is currently planned to be withdrawn from circulation over the next five years. It is due to be phased out of circulation and will cease to be legal tender on 28 February 1998. It is being replaced by a smaller and lighter version which was introduced into circulation on 1 September 1997.

EMU (Publicity)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what EU funding his Department has sought in relation to publicity in respect of the introduction of European monetary union; in respect of which projects or publications such funding was sought; which bodies produced such publicity; and what control his Department exercised over the content of any publicity. [12968]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government have applied for financial assistance to meet half the costs of producing and distributing a guide, "EMU Practical Information for Business". This amounts to around £21,000. The guide was produced entirely by Her Majesty's Treasury to help raise awareness in British business of the practical and strategic implications that the euro would have for their operations whether or not the United Kingdom were to join. Copies of the guide are available in the Library of the House.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total expenditure budget on *(a)* official expenditure and *(b)* overseas travel by Ministers and officials by his Department in the current Session. [12586]

Mrs. Liddell: Between 1 May and 20 October spending on official hospitality by Ministers and officials amounted to £11,400; and £317,100 has been spent on overseas travel and subsistence.

Monetary Policy Committee

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, columns *229–30*, what guidelines the Monetary Policy Committee has adopted in respect of public comments by its members. [12352]

Mrs. Liddell: The minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee meetings record the votes of individual members. Members of the MPC are free to discuss their views in public speeches or comments to the press, but are not permitted to disclose the content of unpublished minutes of the MPC.

The Committee has, moreover, adopted some guidelines on public comments by members which are designed, inter alia, to avoid confusion around the time of MPC meetings. In particular, the Committee has decided that members should avoid giving speeches and contact with the media for a period of eight days from the Friday before the MPC meeting to the Friday after the announcement of the decision on interest rates. In the months when the inflation report is published, this period extends until publication of the report—typically the following Wednesday. The Committee decided that this arrangement should cover public discussion of the UK economy and the decisions and processes of the MPC, but not other issues which are outside the work of the Committee.

DEFENCE

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many individuals took part in the service volunteers programme at the chemical defence establishment during 1996. [12201]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend and understand he did so on 20 August 1997.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 August 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the numbers of service volunteers as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

During 1996 forty two service volunteers took part in various studies as part of service volunteers programme run by the Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of DERA at Porton Down.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* scientific journals and *(b)* other open publications in which staff from the medical division of the chemical defence establishment published papers in 1991 and 1992 arising out of their work and research, indicating the date of publication. [12202]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend and understand he did so on 20 August.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 August 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about scientific journals and open publications in which staff from the medical division at Porton Down have published papers as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

Available databases show that during the years 1991 and 1992 staff from the medical division of the Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of DERA at Porton Down published papers in the following scientific journals.

In 1991:- Adverse Drug Reactions and Toxicological Review; International Journal of Experimental Pathology; Human Experimental Toxicology; British Journal of Plastic Surgery; Proceedings of the British Toxicology Society; York, England, UK, September 20–21 1990 published in Human Experimental Toxicology; Journal of Biomechanics.

In 1992:- British Journal of Surgery; Human Experimental Toxicology; Clinical Intensive Care; Psychopharmacology; Journal of Audiovisual Media in Medicine; Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons England.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what concentrations of the chemical agent CN the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency has assessed that the long-term clinical effects occur; and when this assessment was made. [12184]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend and understand he did so on 20 August 1997.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 August 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about concentrations of the agent CN assessed by DERA as causing long-term clinical effects as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

CN, chloracetophenone, belongs to a group of agents referred to as tear gases; these cause sensory irritation to the eyes, nose and skin.

DERA has not assessed the concentrations of CN that cause long term clinical effects. Most of the information concerning long-term effects in man are based on case reports from the United States, following widespread use during the 1960s Civil Rights Riots. These reports contain no reliable information regarding the concentrations of CN that produced such effects.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what doses of mustard gas have been assessed by DERA as causing scarring of the conjunctiva and permanent damage. [12185]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend and understand he did so on 20 August 1997.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 August 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about doses of mustard gas assessed by DERA as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

The Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of DERA has not assessed the dose levels of mustard gas which cause scarring of the conjunctiva and permanent damage.

However DERA is aware of case reports from the United States which suggest that doses of between 400 and 800 milligrams per cubic metre per minute of mustard vapour result in corneal damage with ulceration and scarring of the conjunctiva.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research has been carried out at the chemical defence establishment into a sensory irritant known as 1-methoxycycloheptatriene since 1967; what was the object of this research; when this research was carried out; and what was the conclusion of this research. [12177]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend and understand he did so on 20 August 1997.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 August 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about research into the sensory irritant known as 1-methoxycycloheptatriene (MCHT) as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

The Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of DERA at Porton Down investigated MCHT in the period between 1974 and the mid-1980s. The studies were intermittent and designed to investigate the sensory irritancy and safety of the compound.

The studies concluded that the advantages of using 1-methoxycycloheptatriene compared to conventional sensory irritants such as CS were not significant.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the chemical defence establishment's assessment of the effect on human health in *(a)* the short-term and *(b)* the long-term of one-off exposure to oleoresin capsicum; what research has been carried out by the chemical defence establishment into oleoresin capsicum since 1967; what was the purpose of this research; when this research was conducted; and what was the conclusion of this research. [12181]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend and understand he did so on 20 August 1997.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 August 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the effects of and research into oleoresin capsicum as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

Oleoresin capsicum (OC) is a natural oil of the chilli pepper. Chemically, it is a complex mixture of over one hundred volatile compounds, in which capsaicin is a principle compound. The Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of DERA at Porton Down has not conducted any practical research on oleoresin capsicum, but it has used capsaicin as a positive control in a number of animal tissue studies designed to evaluate the relative sensory irritancy of a number of compounds.

As far as the effects of oleoresin capsicum on human health are concerned, it is reported in the technical literature that short term exposure causes pain and irritation of the membranes lining the eyes, nose and mouth. Blistering and a rash have been shown to occur after chronic or prolonged exposure of the skin. Ingestion of capsicum may cause acute stinging of the lips, tongue and mouth, and may lead to vomiting and diarrhoea with large doses. Inhalation of the vapours may also cause significant irritation of the airways and prolonged cough.

In the long-term, a single acute exposure to OC may affect the temperature regulatory mechanisms of the body and can affect the neurological system producing long-term insensitivity to pain.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the chemical defence establishment's evaluation of the effects of short-term exposure to mustard gas. [12175]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend and understood he did so on 20 August 1997.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 August 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the evaluation of the effects of short-term exposure to mustard gas as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

Mustard gas, (bis (2-chloroeythyl) sulphide), belongs to a group of chemical warfare agents known as vesicant or blistering agents.

DERA's evaluation, based on historical evidence including casualty reports from the First World War and more recent nursing of Iranian patients in the UK in the mid-1980s, indicates that short term exposure to mustard gas affects the skin, eyes and respiratory tract. Additionally, the evidence available from literature and practical studies is that the gastrointestinal tract, reproductive organs and bone marrow are affected if high doses are absorbed into the body. The effects on the skin consist of reddening followed by blistering; similar effects are seen at the other affected areas. Once the blisters rupture, ulceration of the skin follows; these injuries take a long while to heal. The effects on the eyes, respiratory tract and gastrointestinal tract are similar to those seen in the skin. Initially the tissues become inflamed and swollen. Eventually, the protective membranes break down and areas of ulceration result.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the chemical defence establishment's evaluation of the effects of short-term exposure to lewisite. [12179]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend and understand he did so on 20 August 1997.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 August 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the evaluation of the effects of short-term exposure to lewisite as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

Lewisite is one of a group of chemical warfare agents known as vesicants or blistering agents.

The Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of DERA's evaluation based on US human studies from the 1940s and continuing Porton Down animal studies of the effects of short-term exposure to lewisite are that both liquid and vapour forms result in chemical burns to the skin, eyes and respiratory tract. Lewisite injuries are immediately painful. The potential for widespread damage to the internal organs is significant.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research has been carried out at the chemical defence establishment into perfuoroisobutene since 1967; what was the object of this research; when this research was carried out; and what was the conclusion of this research. [12178]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend and understand he did so on 20 August 1997.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 August 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about research into perfluorisobutene as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

Since 1967 some research into perfluorisobutene has been undertaken at the Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of DERA at Porton Down to assess whether its use as a chemical weapon would pose a potential hazard to the UK Armed Forces. This research encompassed: material producibility, material toxicity, an assessment of material dispersion, the performance of UK CBD protective equipment in providing protection against this material and possible methods of providing pretreatment and treatment against poisoning.

The bulk of this research was conducted during the 1980s with some research on protective measures had medical treatment still ongoing. It has been concluded that this material does have potential as a possible chemical weapon agent and that it does pose a potential hazard to UK Armed Forces. As a consequence of this research certain equipment modifications have been introduced.

Porton Down Staff Newsletter

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current security classification of the newsletter produced for the staff of the chemical defence establishment at Porton Down; how often this newsletter is produced; and when this newsletter was first produced. [12182]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend and understand he did so on 20 August 1997.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Ken Livingstone, dated 20 August 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the staff newsletter at Porton Down as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.

Internal newsletters at Porton Down have been produced in many different forms over the years. They are not usually classified but are not generally circulated outside the MOD.

CBD News was first produced in its current format in February 1995. It is usually published monthly, although there has recently been a three month gap between editions. It is not classified but is only distributed to staff at Porton Down and a small number of staff elsewhere in DERA and MOD.

I hope this is helpful.

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which his Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12564]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Bills Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mr. I. S. Elrick to Mr. Mark Todd, dated 27 October 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about payment for MOD goods and services as, in the main, this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Bills Agency.

The Defence Bills Agency is the Primary bill payment authority for MOD but the Meteorological Office, Hydrographic Office and Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) also undertake specified bill payment action. Set out below is the information you requested for each operating system.

The Defence Bills Agency operates a bespoke system, developed in-house, which integrates contract control functionality with the bill payment system. Certain support functions are provided using systems supplied by AVCO Systems Ltd and ROCC Computers Ltd. During 1996–97 the system was operated on an ICL 3965 Dual Node Mainframe. The operating platform has been uprated in 1997–98 to an ICL SX 485–20 to cope with the additional requirements arising from the introduction of Resource Accounting. The operating cost of the system in 1996–97 was £2.4 million (excluding VAT).

During 1996–97 the Meteorological Office used a Ross purchase ledger run on a VAX machine. DERA assisted in implementing this system and supported both hardware and software. The operating costs of the systems and processes was £222,000 (excluding VAT).

The Hydrographic Office used Prophecy Version 2 running on a DEC Alpha box under UNIX. Software supply, maintenance and development was provided by Radius Computer Systems Ltd. The operating cost of the bill payment systems and processes was £66,000 (excluding VAT) during 1996–97.

During 1996–97 DERA used Digital Equipment Company VAX hardware running Ross Classic software. No sub-contractors were used in developing or operating the system during 1996–97. The operating cost of the systems and processes was £1.8 million (excluding VAT).

Ministry of Defence Police

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Ministry of Defence Police agency for 1997–98. [12580]

Dr. Reid: The following key targets have been set for the Ministry of Defence Policy agency:

Crown Prosecution Service files: to exceed the provincial Home Department police forces' 74 per cent. average rate of compliance with the time limits set for the preparation of CPS files.

To determine a benchmark for satisfaction from victims of crime in the service provided by MDP.

To meet and maintain the national 1996 British crime survey standard of 80 per cent. for public satisfaction with the MDP's policing and security services.

By 1 April 1998 to have achieved the standard of Investors in People.

By 31 March 1998 to have reduced the force complement to a level at or below 3,750 officers.

By 31 March 1998 to implement the additional area policing teams approved by Ministers.

To achieve the level of efficiency savings of 2.5 per cent. prescribed within Departmental and efficiency plans.

Overseas Security Forces (Training)

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what safeguards are in place to ensure United Kingdom troops are not involved in training overseas security forces later used in internal repression. [12347]

Dr. Reid: The provision of training for overseas security forces is a valuable tool in furthering the Government's defence and foreign policy objectives. Requests for training are considered on a case-by-case basis. Close contact is maintained between the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and training would not be provided where we considered it would contribute to human rights violations. Even where human rights is not specifically covered, training provided by our military forces supports Government human rights policy by exposing overseas students to human rights standards and helping them develop an understanding of how armed forces operate in a democratic society.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training United Kingdom troops have given to the Kenyan army and security forces. [12348]

Dr. Reid: It has been the practice in the past not to release details of military assistance provided to other countries on the grounds that this information is confidential between Governments and disclosure would risk damaging our international relations. This practice is now being reviewed against the background of the Government's commitment to openness. I will write to my hon. Friend once the review is complete.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training of members of the Colombian police force in Colombia is being undertaken by the SAS. [12846]

Dr. Reid: Any comment on such matters could cause harm in terms of one or more of the defence, security or international relations exemptions in the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information".

Energy and Environmental Education

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to review its relationship with non-governmental organisations involved in energy and environmental education. [12546]

Mr. Spellar: My Department's relationships with non-governmental organisations involved in energy or environmental training has extended to contracting for such training when required. We have introduced more in-house environmental training, which includes energy education, to meet most of our current needs. There will nevertheless be a continuing requirement for specialist NGO training to meet the needs of staff in key environmental protection and energy appointments.

Exports (Indonesia)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the normal offset arrangement for Indonesia for purchases above 500 million rupiahs; and what percentage offset was required as part of the deal to export Hawk trainers to Indonesia. [12341]

Mr. Spellar: For contracts over 500 million rupiahs, a 100 per cent. obligation is incurred. The contracts signed in 1993 and 1996 for the export of Hawk trainers to Indonesia were both in excess of 500 million rupiahs.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the potential benefits from use of the private finance initiative in his Department's projects in Northern Ireland. [12959]

Dr. Reid: I have given approval for two pilot PFI projects to be run to explore the feasibility of the Army making use of the private finance initiative in Northern Ireland. One involves the provision of families quarters in Ballymena, Antrim and Lisburn areas and the other the provision of living and working accommodation and facilities management in Lisburn. A briefing day for firms interested in the families quarters project was held on 20 October 1997 but it is too early to assess the potential benefits if the PFI proves practicable.

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the security implications of non-civil service arrangements for the work presently carried out in his Department by Building Management (Northern Ireland). [12958]

Dr. Reid: Management, construction and maintenance of the Defence estate in Northern Ireland is carried out by a combination of commercial firms, MOD civil servants and service personnel. We are currently reviewing the headquarters Northern Ireland estate organisation, including the Building Management (Northern Ireland) element. As part of this we shall be taking into account the financial and personnel, as well as security, implications of any proposals for change.

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for replacing civilian workers with Army personnel in his Department's establishments in Northern Ireland. [12960]

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman will understand that the military and civilian manpower mix in MOD establishments in Northern Ireland is kept under review to provide the most efficient and cost effective use of personnel.

Higher Education Sponsorship

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what percentage of *(a)* women and *(b)* men in full-time higher education receive financial aid or sponsorship from the (i) Army, (ii) Royal Navy and (iii) Royal Air Force. [12923]

Dr. Reid: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Parliament Buildings

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made on the financing of new buildings for the European Parliament in Brussels and Strasbourg. [12510]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We have consistently pressed for value for money and sound financial practice in all European institutions. Overall ceilings for expenditure are set by the Council, but within that, spending by the European Parliament on building and other programmes is a matter for the Parliament in the first place, subject to scrutiny of its spending by the European Court of Auditors. We have not made separate representations.

European Courts

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* those functions of final decision that will lie within the competence of the European Community Court of Justice in Luxembourg in respect of (i) criminal and (ii) civil cases and *(b)* those functions concerning human rights that will be within the competence of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, following the coming into force of the treaty of Amsterdam. [12848]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The European Court of Justice in Luxembourg will continue to have jurisdiction to give preliminary rulings on questions of Community law in cases referred to it by courts or tribunals of a member state pursuant to article 177 of the treaty establishing the European Community. It will also acquire jurisdiction to give preliminary rulings on questions relating to certain instruments adopted under the revised title VI of the treaty on European Union—police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters—in cases referred to it by courts or tribunals in any member state which, by a declaration, accepts that jurisdiction. We do not intend to accept that jurisdiction.

The treaty of Amsterdam does not affect the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, which is governed by the European convention for the protection of human rights and freedoms, and the protocols thereto.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which *(a)* criminal and *(b)* civil matters relating to the European Community and Union will come within the competence of the European Community Court of Justice either as direct jurisdiction, by case law, or after consultation by national court subsequent to the coming into force of the treaty of Amsterdam. [12866]

Mr. Henderson: The European Court of Justice will continue to have jurisdiction to give preliminary rulings on questions of Community law in cases, whether criminal or civil, which may be referred to it by courts or tribunals in a member state pursuant to article 177 of the treaty establishing the European Community. It will also acquire jurisdiction to give preliminary rulings on questions relating to certain instruments adopted under title VI of the Treaty on European Union as revised by the treaty of Amsterdam—police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters—in cases referred to it by courts or tribunals in any member state which, by a declaration, accepts that jurisdiction. We do not intend to accept that jurisdiction.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which matters concerning human rights will be determined by *(a)* the Court of European Human Rights in Strasbourg and *(b)* the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg, following the coming into force of the treaty of Amsterdam. [12867]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The treaty of Amsterdam does not affect the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, which is governed by the European convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the protocols thereto. The European Court of Justice in Luxembourg will have jurisdiction in the field of fundamental rights only with regard to action of the Community institutions, in so far as the Court has jurisdiction under the treaties establishing the European Communities and under the Treaty on European Union.

EU Funding (Political Groups)

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much European Communities funding was made available to the *(a)* PSE, *(b)* PPE, *(c)* ELDR and *(d)* EdN groups of the European Parliament in the last year for which figures are available. [12291]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The total amount of EU funding made available to the political groups in the European Parliament in 1995 was 12.055 mecu—£17.5 million. The 1997 budget allows for 12.5 mecu—£18 million.

We are awaiting figures broken down against individual political groups. I will write to the hon. Member when this information is received.

European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, columns *90–91*, what aspects of culture will be monitored by the European monitoring centre on racism and xenophobia. [12331]

Mr. Doug Henderson: It will be for the centre itself to decide on its work programme. The monitoring centre must, however, carry out its tasks within the limits of Community competence.

Western European Union

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Agenda 2000 applicant countries will be expected to treat membership of the Western European Union as acquis communautaires. [12529]

Mr. Doug Henderson: No. Membership of the European Union does not require membership of the Western European Union, which is a separate organisation.

European Commission (Special Advisers)

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many special advisers are employed at the European Commission; for which commissioners they work; what is their nationality; what is their total pay; and if he will make a statement. [12327]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Each Commissioner is entitled to appoint one paid special adviser. Special advisers are not full-time employees of the Commission. They are consulted ad hoc, and paid per day worked. Total pay for all special advisers in 1996 was 165,000 ecu. They are not selected on the basis of nationality.

Turkey

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with the Treasury over the cost of the measures proposed by the European Commission to deepen European Union relations with Turkey; and if he will make a statement. [12344]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My Department is in regular contact with the Treasury about the European Commission's proposals for deepening relations with Turkey. The UK supports the Commission's view that these should be financed from existing resources under the customs union protocol agreed by the Council in 1995 and the MEDA regulation.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the European Commission's proposal to increase co-operation between the EU and Turkey *(a)* on the environment, *(b)* on social development, *(c)* on justice and home affairs and *(d)* on humanitarian issues. [12328]

Mr. Henderson: We welcome the European Commission's proposal to increase co-operation in the above areas, which would benefit EU member states and Turkey.

Cyprus

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy on the accession of Cyprus to the EU. [12530]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We support Cyprus' accession to the EU. We hope that this will be on the basis of a settlement, leading to the accession of a bizonal, bicommunal federation. This will bring benefits to both communities on the island.

European Union (Co-operation)

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government on increasing co-operation in the European Union at the consular and diplomatic level; and if he will make a statement. [12316]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The obligation on diplomatic and consular missions of Member states to co-operate in implementing common measures adopted by the Council was created by article J.6 of the Maastricht Treaty. That obligation is relocated but unchanged in article J.10 of the draft Amsterdam treaty. We are committed to ensuring effective implementation of agreed EU policies.

Prince Programme

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much of the Prince programme funding has been spent in the United Kingdom since the programme's inception; on what it has been spent; what plans he has in respect of further projects; what safeguards he has put in place to prevent its use for promotional purposes; and if he will make a statement. [12343]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Total prince spending in the UK in 1996—the first full year of the programme—was around 450,000 ecu. Of this, around 400,000 ecu was spent on Citizens First and 50,000 ecu on information about the Intergovernmental conference.

We are committed to raising the profile of Citizens First in the UK as we fully support its aim of informing people about their rights and opportunities in the EU. We will be helping to publicise the second phase of the programme over the next few months.

We have also applied for funding from Prince to meet half the costs of our "EMU: Information for Business" guide. The guide was produced by HM Treasury to help raise awareness in British business of the practical implications of EMU for their operations whether the UK were to join or not.

We believe that the British people have a right to accurate information about the EU, whether from Government Departments or from the Community institutions.

EU (Estonian Accession)

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of provisions relating to a common foreign and security policy in the draft Amsterdam treaty on the accession of Estonia to the EU. [12537]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Nothing in the CFSP provisions in the draft Amsterdam treaty will affect Estonia's eligibility to join the EU. Estonia, like every other applicant, would be expected to take on all the obligations in the treaty.

EU Citizenship

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy towards the recommendations contained in the second report from the Commission on citizenship of the Union (EC Cons Doc 8856/97). [12476]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We welcome the report's recommendation that the EU improve citizens' awareness of their rights within the Union. In support of the aim, we are working to raise the profile of the Citizens First programme in the UK. We also agree with the need to ensure that citizen's rights are enforced.

The report claims that EU citizens will not have tangible evidence of the full effects of the internal market without the elimination of border controls. The UK's position is clear: our border controls are not incompatible with the proper functioning of the internal market, including the free movement of persons. We do not intend to eliminate the UK's border controls, which are guaranteed in the treaty of Amsterdam.

Child Trafficking (West Africa)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet representatives from *(a)* anti-slavery and child welfare organisations, *(b)* the United Nations and *(c)* west African Governments to discuss the trafficking of children in west Africa; and if he will make a statement. [12895]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We deplore the practice of child trafficking. We have given strong support to the work of the United Nations, including the special rapporteur on the sale of children, in monitoring and combating it. We will continue to work for an end to the practice with relevant Governments and non-governmental organisations concerned with the issue.

Dependent Territories

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for consultation with the Governments of dependent territories during the current review of their status. [12961]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have begun consultations with the Governments of the dependent territories. The Government of Gibraltar was already considering proposals for constitutional change before we announced this review. We will therefore be looking at these proposals separately.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list by section those aspects of the Amsterdam treaty which will require primary legislation to amend any United Kingdom Act of Parliament. [12849]

Mr. Doug Henderson: It will be necessary to amend section 1(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 to give effect in domestic law to those provisions of the treaty of Amsterdam and those protocols adopted at Amsterdam which will form part of the Community legal order. These are articles 2 to 9, article 12, and the other provisions of the treaty so far as they relate to those articles; as well as the protocols adopted at Amsterdam other than the protocol on article J.7 of the treaty on European Union.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what copies of the provisional draft treaty of Amsterdam were available in the United Kingdom between its publication and 2 October; when and by whom the substantive text of the treaty, as signed on 2 October, was published in the United Kingdom; what significant changes in the text were made between the provisional and signatory versions of the treaty; and if he will place in the Library a full list of such changes. [12811]

Mr. Henderson: Copies of the following versions of the draft treaty of Amsterdam were sent to Parliament on these dates:

CONF/4001: 18 June
CONF/4002: 16 July
CONF/4004: 7 August
CONF/4005: 26 September

The final version of the treaty—CONF 4007—was sent to Parliament on 10 October, and will be published shortly as a command paper. No major changes were made in the text of the treaty between the provisional version and the treaty as signed. There were a number of declarations made which do not form part of the treaty.

Colombia

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what ministerial visits have been made to Colombia since 1 August; and if Ministers visited camps containing displaced peasant farmers forced from their lands by paramilitary groups. [12786]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I am the only member of the Government to have visited Colombia since 1 August. I did not visit any of the camps containing displaced people, although I met and discussed the issue with their representatives.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with the Colombian Government about the situation of internally displaced peasant farmers in Colombia; and if he will make a statement. [12804]

Mr. Lloyd: The plight of the displaced people of Colombia is a symptom of the internal conflict in that country. During my visit to Colombia last month, I raised with the Colombian Government our concerns about a variety of humanitarian problems resulting from the internal security situation, including that of displaced people.

Official Functions and Conferences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* official entertainment functions and *(b)* conferences which have been held at (i) Chevening and (ii) 1 Carlton Gardens since May 1997. [12921]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The following official functions have taken place at Chevening:

Conference organised by the Department of Social Services;
British German Economic Committee;
Conference arranged by the Department of Trade and Industry;
FCO Board of Management;
Conference for GCHQ.

In the majority of these cases these discussions required participants to stay overnight.

At 1 Carlton gardens the following functions have been held:

21 May: Dinner for the governor of Hong Kong
24 May: Lunch for the Japanese Foreign Minister
12 June: Dinner for the Crown Prince of Nepal
7 July: Lunch for the Omani Foreign Minister
10 July: Lunch for the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group
21 July: Dinner for the Amir of Qatar
23 July: Lunch for the French Foreign Minister
8 September: Dinner for the American ambassador
10 September: Dinner for the Luxembourg Foreign Minister

11 September: Lunch for the Austrian Foreign Minister

12 September: Lunch for the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group

12 September: Tea for the Italian Foreign Minister

20 October: Tea for the Belgian Foreign Minister

21 October: Lunch for the American ambassador

22 October: Lunch for the chief executive of the Hong Kong special administrative region.

OSCE Vienna Conference

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he wrote to the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee inviting him to nominate a member to attend the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe conference in Vienna on politico-military aspects of security. [12802]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I wrote to the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee on 30 July. I invited the Committee to nominate a representative to join the UK delegation to the conference on the code of conduct on politico-military aspects of security in Vienna from 22 to 24 September.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons an invitation for a particular parliamentarian to attend the OSCE conference on politico-military aspects of security was addressed to the Foreign Affairs Committee and not to the OSCE delegation. [12803]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The conference in Vienna from 22 to 24 September to review the code of conduct on politico-military aspects of security was the first such conference since the code's adoption in December 1994. I addressed the invitation to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, rather than the UK delegation to the OSCE parliamentary assembly, because the democratic control of the military in Europe is a subject of wider, foreign affairs interest.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which his Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12566]

The Attorney-General: The position in relation to the Department for which I am responsible is as follows:

The Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service has 13 geographical areas, a central case work group and a national headquarters. Each area has its own accounts section which is responsible for handling invoices for goods and services received and claims from prosecution witnesses in respect of expense claims for attendance at court.

In 1996–97 the CPS employed Chessington Computer Services Ltd. to process and make payments to suppliers and to witnesses. The software used by Chessington Computer Services Ltd. was the management accounting information system, MAISY. The cost of this service was £723,894.

There are no sub-contractors involved in making payments. The internal process costs could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office use a payment processing package known as Purchase Ledger supplied by CEDARDATA.

The majority of payments are made through Paymaster by payable order or, if to another Government Department, by transfer. No sub-contractors are involved.

The cost of processing payments in 1996–97 is estimated at £32,500.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

All payments for goods and services supplied to Treasury Solicitor's Department and my own office are processed by the Treasury Solicitor's Department's financial accounting and information system, FAIS, which uses Image software supplied by TABS Ltd.

The majority of payments are made through Paymaster by payable order or, if to another Government Department, by transfer. In addition, the Department has recently implemented a facility which enables payments to be made via the bank automated clearing system. No sub-contractors are involved.

The cost of processing payments in 1996–97 is estimated at £109,000.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Leslie: To ask the Attorney-General if he will assess the advantages of the Crown Prosecution Service consulting victims of crime about the progress and status of their cases. [12478]

The Attorney-General: The victim's charter, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, sets out 27 standards of service that victims of crime can expect from criminal justice agencies including the Crown Prosecution service. These include best endeavours by the police to keep victims informed of significant developments in their case and asking about any fears the victim may have about further victimisation and details of loss, damage or injury. The Crown Prosecution service will taken this information, together with other known views of the victim, into account when making their decisions. Direct consultation between the CPS and victims is not normally appropriate since the victim will in most cases also be a prosecution witness.

Two schemes aimed at improving arrangements for keeping victims informed of progress in their case and ensuring that their interests are taken into account are at present being evaluated. In addition, the independent review of the Crown Prosecution Service will also consider ways to enable the Crown Prosecution Service to inform victims of crime about prosecution decisions.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Schools (Parental Choice)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many appeals have been made by parents on the grounds of non-admission of their child to the school of their choice, in each local education authority, in the latest year for which figures are available. [12795]

Mr. Byers: The information requested by the hon. Member is set out in the following tables. More statistical details on admission appeals are in a departmental press notice published on 15 October. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library.

Number of admission appeals heard in maintained primary and secondary schools by local education authority area

England *1995–96*

Local Education Authority Area	*Number of appeals heard* *Primary*	*Secondary*
England	18,794	25,206
North-east	652	605
Hartlepool[3]	0	15
Middlesbrough[3]	2	0
Redcar and Cleveland[3]	0	41
Stockon on Tees[3]	9	65
Durham	297	102
Northumberland	6	66
Gateshead	48	18
Newcastle upon Tyne	130	141
North Tyneside	16	2
South Tyneside	55	26
Sunderland	89	129
North-west and Merseyside	3,608	4,433
North west	3,216	3,353
Cheshire	62	154
Cumbria	167	49
Bolton	168	178
Bury	150	230
Manchester	486	342
Oldham	37	150
Rochdale	190	87
Salford	135	128
Stockport	94	149
Tameside	105	289
Trafford	139	207
Wigan	87	120
Lancashire	1,396	1,270
Merseyside	392	1,080
Knowsley	17	0
Liverpool	186	620
St. Helens	78	43
Sefton	63	123
Wirral	48	294
Yorkshire and Humber	1,313	2,942
East Riding of Yorkshire[3]	41	163
City of Kingston upon Hull[3]	162	160
North East Lincolnshire[3]	27	81
North Lincolnshire[3]	14	22
City of York[3]	7	97
North Yorkshire[3]	85	356
Barnsley	40	31
Doncaster	28	52
Rotherham	32	82
Sheffield	85	156
Bradford	156	1,055
Calderdale[1]	62	179
Kirklees	78	86
Leeds	408	388
Wakefield	88	34
East Midlands	599	853
Derbyshire	199	193
Leicestershire	86	193
Lincolnshire	83	246
Northamptonshire	68	161
Nottinghamshire[1]	163	60
West Midlands	2,829	3,331
Hereford and Worcester	31	100
Shropshire	488	247
Staffordshire[1]	44	329
Warwickshire	313	199
Birmingham	1,129	1,503
Coventry	258	271
Dudley	239	203
Sandwell	242	45
Solihull	41	222
Walsall	10	113
Wolverhampton	34	99
Eastern	1,132	1,691
Bedfordshire	134	234
Cambridgeshire[2]	0	104
Essex	252	414
Hertfordshire	628	821
Norfolk	53	57
Suffolk	65	61
London	5,383	6,907
Inner London	1,354	1,828
City of London	0	[4]—
Camden	62	252
Greenwich	159	131
Hackney	140	179
Hammersmith and Fulham[1]	18	15
Islington	86	91
Kensington and Chelsea	0	23
Lambeth[1]	207	101
Lewisham	303	247
Southwark	162	118
Tower Hamlets	101	255
Wandsworth	105	231
Westminster	11	185
Outer London	4,029	5,079
Barking and Dagenham	134	91
Barnet	201	426
Bexley	391	88
Brent	62	138
Bromley	223	393
Croydon[2]	35	134
Ealing	185	154
Enfield	177	812
Haringey	173	248
Harrow	315	47
Havering	166	282
Hillingdon	213	133
Hounslow	70	358
Kingston upon Thames	58	149
Merton	169	41
Newham[1]	92	244
Redbridge	371	337
Richmond upon Thames	240	199
Sutton[1]	220	281
Waltham Forest	534	524
South-east	1,705	2,870
Berkshire	259	736
Buckinghamshire	73	501
East Sussex	100	158
Hampshire	179	148

Number of admission appeals heard in maintained primary and secondary schools by local education authority area

England *1995–96*

Local Education Authority Area	*Number of appeals heard* *Primary*	*Secondary*
Isle of Wight	5	86
Kent	138	602
Oxfordshire	121	130
Surrey	719	392
West Sussex	111	117
South-west	1,573	1,574
Bath and NE Somerset[3]	101	175
City of Bristol[3]	294	175
North Somerset[3]	35	12
South Gloucestershire[3]	322	267
Cornwall	174	71
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Devon	117	173
Dorset	195	250
Gloucestershire	93	256
Somerset	203	63
Wiltshire	39	132

[1] LEA maintained county and voluntary controlled and grant-maintained schools only.

[2] Grant-maintained schools only.

[3] From 1 April 1996.

[4] No schools of this type.

Departmental Publications

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 17 July, *Official Report,* column *310,* how much public money was spent by the Stationery Office in printing the White Paper "Excellence in schools". [12774]

Mr. Byers: None. The Stationery Office Limited is a private company, which printed "Excellence in Schools" at its own expense.

Assisted Places (South Gloucestershire)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils resident in South Gloucestershire unitary authority are in receipt of assisted places in the current financial year; and what estimate he has made of the cost of those places. [12829]

Mr. Byers: Information about the local education authority area from which assisted pupils originate is not collected centrally. One school, Tockington Manor school, situated in the South Gloucestershire unitary authority area participates in the assisted places scheme with four assisted pupils at an estimated total cost of £16,812 in academic year 1997–98.

Jean Monnet Projects

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* criteria are for selection of Jean Monnet projects in the United Kingdom; which chairs and professorships are funded in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [12505]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The EC programme, "Jean Monnet: European Integration in University Studies", was established in 1989 on the initiative of the European Parliament. It is implemented by the European Commission without direct involvement on the part of EU member states.

The Commission does not publish details of funding allocations to member states under this programme. The 1997 programme vademecum published by the European Commission lists the following criteria for selection:

> "The proposed project must deal specifically and entirely with the issue of European integration.
>
> All teaching activities carried out within the framework of a Jean Monnet Chair must fulfil this requirement.
>
> It must be an entirely new initiative, set up for the first time at the beginning of the 1997–98 academic year.
>
> Priority will be given to compulsory courses of study (this applies to the "Jean Monnet Chairs" and permanent courses) and to those reaching a wide audience.
>
> The proposed project should be clearly inserted into the university's teaching programme and correspond to the academic criteria of quality and feasibility.
>
> Priority will be given this year to the creation of new Jean Monnet Chairs and to the development of complementary initiatives which, in the framework of the 1990–92 Jean Monnet Chairs, will lead to the setting up of European centres of excellence.
>
> Selection will be made according to the applications submitted (all applications submitted will be taken into consideration) on the basis of the recommendations of the European University Council for the Jean Monnet Project."

A list of Jean Monnet projects from 1990–97 published by the European Commission includes the following Jean Monnet Chairs in UK universities:

University of Aberdeen
European integration studies

Robert Gordon University
European public policy

University of Wales Aberystwyth
European integration

University of Bath
Politics of the EC

European political union

European integration and international business

Queen's University Belfast
European social policy

History of European integration

University of Birmingham
European economics

Constitution and administrative law of the EC

Political economy of European integration

University of Bradford
European integration studies

University of Sussex
European studies

The economics of European integration

Contemporary European studies

University of Bristol
European Community studies

University of Cambridge
European studies

European Community law

University of Kent at Canterbury
Politics of European integration

University of Wales—College of Cardiff
Political economics with special reference to the European Community

The politics of European economic integration

University of Essex
European politics

European economic integration

European Union law

European political integration

University of Ulster
European law (2 Chairs)

Coventry University
European studies

University of Warwick
Law and politics of European integration

University of Dundee
European energy, environmental and economic law

University of Durham
European Community law

University of Edinburgh
European Community law

Economics

European law

University of Glasgow
European politics

University of Strathclyde
European law

European public policy

Economics of European integration

University of Hull
European integration

EC social law

Kingston University

European law

Lancaster University
European Union law

University of Leeds
European Parliamentary studies

European Union studies

European law and integration

European integration and international business management

Leeds Metropolitan University
European Community legal studies

University of Leicester
European Community law

European economics studies

European integration

De Montfort University
European economy

University of Lincolnshire and Humberside
European economic integration

University of Liverpool
European Union law

London School of Economics and Political Science
European Community politics

Economics of the EC

Queen Mary and Westfield College, London
History of contemporary Europe

South Bank University
The history and theory of European integration

Thames Valley University
Community studies

University College London
European economics and integration

University of Greenwich
Political economy of European integration

University of North London
European integration studies

University of Westminster
European integration studies

Loughborough University of Technology
European politics (2 Chairs)

University of Manchester
Politics of the new Europe

Economics of European integration

University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne
European community law and policy

University of Northumbria at Newcastle
The law and policy of the European Community

University of East Anglia
European integration

University of Nottingham
European law

University of Oxford
European institutions and politics

University of Paisley
European integration and public policy

University of Glamorgan
European Community law

University of Portsmouth
European Community studies

University of Reading
The international dimension of European integration

University of Salford
History, politics and culture of the EC

University of Sheffield
Political science

University of Southampton
European integration

Economics

University of St Andrews
European integration studies

University of York
European economics

Student Grants

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the annual saving to his Department from the abolition of mandatory student grants; and if these sums will be applied to higher education. [12688]

Dr. Howells: Under the proposals announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 23 July, mandatory student grants will be replaced with increased loans. In the short term, therefore, public expenditure on student support will not be reduced and there will be no savings on the basis of current accounting rules. Savings will be realised in the longer term as graduates begin to make repayments and will be used to improve quality, standards and opportunities for all in further and higher education.

Special Needs

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what training for persons working with special needs children in the classroom is recognised by his Department. [12483]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department's new standards for trainee teachers mean that all newly-qualified teachers will understand their responsibilities under the special educational needs code of practice, be capable of identifying children with SEN and be able to differentiate teaching practice appropriately.

An additional qualification, approved by the Secretary of State, is mandatory for teachers of classes of visually-impaired and hearing-impaired children. The Green Paper on SEN, published last week, will address further issues about the professional development of teaching and non-teaching staff.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research his Department has evaluated into potential regional variations in provision for special needs children. [12482]

Ms Morris: The Department is aware, from its contact with parents, teachers, schools, voluntary organisations, local education authorities, and other service providers, that there are wide variations in the access to and the quality of provision available to pupils with special educational needs. That is why the Green Paper on SEN, "Excellence for All Children: meeting Special Educational Needs", which was published on 22 October, announced the Department's intention to:

> "work to secure a continuum of provision across the country, so that no matter where pupils live and what their needs, an appropriate level of support is available".

We recognise that not all LEAs will be able to provide the full range of support needed to achieve this aim. The Green Paper proposes, therefore, the development of regional planning arrangements for some aspects of SEN provision. We shall be consulting widely on this and other proposals contained in the Green Paper throughout the autumn. In the meantime we are supporting a project, co-ordinated by the Royal National Institute for the Blind, which is examining ways of securing effective regional co-ordination for certain aspects of SEN provision.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in what circumstances parents with severely disabled children have the right to choose a non-mainstream education establishment outside the relevant local education authority area. [12484]

Ms Morris: Children with severe disabilities would normally be given a statement of special educational needs by their local education authority. The LEA must invite the parents of such children to name their preferred school when they are served a copy of the child's draft statement. The LEA is required to name the parents' preferred school—whether it is a mainstream or a special school—in the statement, provided it is appropriate to the child's age, ability, aptitude, and special educational needs, and is compatible with the interests of other children already in the school and with the efficient use of resources. If the parents' preferred school is maintained by another LEA, the home LEA must consult both the school governing body and the maintaining LEA of the school before naming the school in the statement. The school named in a child's statement is required to admit the child.

Higher Education

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what additional resources he plans to put into higher education for each year of the planning period. [12577]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 23 September, a package of measures which will allow an extra £165 million to be spent on higher education in 1998–99. The level of funding for the higher education sector in 1999–2000 and beyond will be decided in the light of the Government's current comprehensive expenditure review.

Universities (Tuition Fees)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what mechanism he plans to introduce to ensure that universities are not financially disadvantaged by accepting students who are exempt from tuition fees. [12603]

Dr. Howells: There will be no disincentive to universities to accept students who are assessed as not having to contribute to tuition. For 1998–99 local education authorities will conduct an assessment of income to determine how much students or their parents should contribute to the £1,000 tuition fee. The local education authority will pay the public contribution to the fee directly to the university or college where the student is enrolled. The university or college will be responsible for collecting the contribution from the student. Universities and colleges will retain these funds. The administrative arrangements for later years are still under consideration and will be announced later.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he plans to take in respect of the introduction of tuition fees to ensure that the resources provided to universities reflect the average tuition costs of the courses they provide relative to the national average, with particular reference to medicine. [12576]

Dr. Howells: Under our preferred funding option, full-time undergraduates will contribute up to £1,000 a year in tuition fees, depending on family income, with the balance being met from public funds. The maximum payable—£1,000—represents around a quarter of the average annual cost of undergraduate courses. The remainder will be met from public funds through the teaching grant for universities and colleges allocated by the Higher Education Funding Council. The funding council's teaching grant allocations reflect each institution's student numbers and the relative average costs of providing courses in broad subject categories. Universities and college which provide medical courses will receive considerably more in teaching grant per medical student than the national average per student across all subjects.

Class Sizes

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average class size *(a)* in maintained schools in England and Wales, *(b)* for five, six and seven-year-olds in maintained schools in England and Wales, *(c)* for maintained primary schools in England and Wales and *(d)* for maintained secondary schools in England and Wales at (i) 1 May, (ii) 1 June and (iii) 1 July. [12569]

Mr. Byers: The information is not available in the form requested.

The average class size of classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary and secondary schools in England in January 1997 were 27.5 and 21.7 respectively; the equivalent figure for key stage 1 classes in primary schools was 26.9.

Information on class sizes in Wales is the responsibility of my hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which his Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12562]

Dr. Howells: Information on the functions relating to payment for goods and services supplied for which the Secretary of State's Department is responsible, the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Parenthood Courses

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals he has to promote courses in parenthood. [12481]

Ms Estelle Morris: As stated in the White Paper, "Excellence in Schools" published on 7 July, the Government intend that all secondary schools should have a role in teaching young people the skills of good parenting, both formally and through contact with good adult role models. The Department will be considering with teachers and others how this might best be achieved and what parenting education programmes should contain.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 25 July, *Official Report*, columns *768–69*, on training and enterprise councils, how many starts were made for the two categories in each TEC area in each of the last three years. [12302]

Dr. Howells: Information for *(a)* the proportion endorsed as having special training needs on entering youth training, and *(b)* the proportion reporting that they had a disability on entering training for work, for each TEC area in England is given in the following tables.

Proportion of starts with disabilities/special training needs on Youth Training and Training for Work

Per cent.

	1994–95		*1995–96*		*1996–97*	
	YT[1]	*TfW*[2]	*YT*[1]	*TfW*[2]	*YT*[1]	*TfW*[2]
Bedfordshire	19	11	17	15	9	24
CAMBSTEC	30	19	15	17	16	24
North Derbyshire	32	17	25	18	27	27
South Derbyshire	23	15	21	16	19	18
Leicestershire	3	18	2	17	2	32
Lincolnshire	18	20	21	16	15	23
Norfolk and Waveney	23	9	20	18	22	25
Northamptonshire	24	20	24	26	22	26
Greater Nottingham	19	14	17	18	16	23
North Nottingham	16	14	19	14	20	26
Greater Peterborough	23	13	16	24	17	23
Suffolk	12	16	12	19	8	27
Co. Durham	33	20	32	15	34	19
Northumberland	27	17	27	18	23	19
Teesside	30	11	31	10	31	14
Tyneside	29	11	25	14	24	17
Sunderland City	37	76	31	71	26	18
Barnsley/Doncaster	24	9	26	13	20	18
Bradford and District	28	18	27	15	24	17
Calderdale and Kirklees	20	15	22	16	23	20
Humberside	25	14	23	14	28	18
Leeds	20	17	14	16	27	25
Rotherham	27	20	14	17	19	24
Sheffield	27	12	19	14	18	20
Wakefield	22	16	29	23	18	31
North Yorkshire	16	20	28	23	36	24
Bolton/Bury	17	18	19	15	16	17
NORMIDTEC	27	11	26	14	23	15
South and East Cheshire	39	18	15	17	12	20
Cumbria	29	15	25	17	29	17
ELTEC	16	15	16	18	26	23
LAWTEC	19	19	22	15	30	22
Manchester	18	15	17	16	18	18
Merseyside	33	11	38	11	32	13
Oldham	31	16	28	13	27	14
Rochdale	31	15	23	18	28	19
St. Helens	34	7	26	9	26	13
Stockport and High Peak	15	19	12	15	12	19
METROTEC(Wigan)	20	14	17	14	28	14
CEWTEC	14	11	13	13	16	17
Birmingham	20	19	15	11	12	16
Central England	21	17	14	23	13	32
Coventry and Warwick	23	16	23	16	22	23
Dudley	7	14	10	16	10	21
HAWTEC (Hereford and Worcester)	21	20	18	20	12	29
Sandwell	16	15	15	16	15	17
Shropshire	21	21	18	19	17	25
Staffordshire	17	15	16	13	20	20
Walsall	7	11	6	16	11	24
Wolverhampton	16	9	13	11	16	17
WESTEC	19	12	14	13	13	25
Devon and Cornwall	n/a	17	n/a	22	n/a	25
Dorset	23	14	24	16	24	22

Proportion of starts with disabilities/special training needs on Youth Training and Training for Work

Per cent.

	1994–95		1995–96		1996–97	
	YT[1]	TfW[2]	YT[1]	TfW[2]	YT[1]	TfW[2]
Gloucester	10	19	9	22	9	28
Somerset	21	17	24	22	28	23
Wiltshire	14	18	12	21	9	30
Essex	7	11	7	17	7	16
Hampshire	16	12	20	14	20	19
Heart of England	9	12	10	13	11	17
Hertfordshire	16	13	9	16	7	22
Wight Training and Enterprise	26	15	26	9	26	29
Kent	11	16	10	19	13	22
Milton Keynes	22	17	18	18	18	34
Surrey	14	11	11	17	8	22
Sussex	10	12	6	18	5	21
Thames Valley	11	14	7	10	9	9
AZTEC	15	7	13	11	10	14
North London	17	12	22	7	25	9
North West London	21	9	16	7	17	11
CILNTEC	34	5	28	8	31	20
CENTEC	35	5	41	7	37	11
London East	24	8	22	10	18	16
SOLOTEC	24	12	23	13	24	17
West London	31	11	14	14	15	15
South Thames	4	6	47	50	0	0
CENTEC (South Thames)	29	12	43	8	60	17
SOLOTEC (South Thames)	10	4	20	9	n/a	n/a
CENTRIC	n/a	n/a	9	0	1	10
England	24	15	22	16	23	19

Notes:

1. Those endorsed as having special training needs on entering Work Based Training for Young People.

2. All people with disabilities entering Training for Work.

Source:

YT/TfW Trainee databases.

Nursery Education

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the annual cost of providing a child with five full days per week in a nursery school. [12690]

Mr. Byers: The 1995–96 estimated unit cost per full-time equivalent pupil in a maintained nursery school in England is £3,640.

Students

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his target for the expansion of student numbers during the next five years; and what proportion of this target he expects to be achieved through part-time enrolment. [12578]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, has made clear that the Government intend to set a target for an extra 500,000 people to enter further and higher education by 2002. We expect that part-time enrolment will contribute significantly to this total.

Teachers' Salaries

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average salary of a teacher with five years' experience in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools. [12691]

Mr. Byers: The average salary at 31 March 1996 for teachers in England and Wales with five years experience was £19,750 in maintained nursery and primary schools and £20,430 in maintained secondary schools.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received concerning the effects on part-time students of the reduction in permitted study hours from 21 to 16 per week to maintain jobseeker's allowance entitlement; and if he will make a statement. [12298]

Mr. Alan Howarth: I have not received representations on this specific issue although my colleagues and I receive correspondence on a range of issues relating to the jobseeker's allowance rules.

The Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 1996 introduced a definition of part-time students. Part-time study had not previously been defined in social security legislation. What is regarded as part-time depends on the type of course and where it is provided. In England and Wales, courses which are funded or part-funded by the further education funding councils of no more than 16 guided learning hours per week are regarded as part-time. This reflects the way in which the sector operates its part-time courses.

We will be reviewing the job-seeker's allowance rules on education and training in the light of the jobseeker's allowance workskills pilots, which we expanded in September this year, and early experience of new deal measures for the long-term unemployed.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, how many claimants had their jobseeker's allowance reduced during 1996–97 for *(a)* two weeks and *(b)* four weeks for not attending or failing to complete (i) jobplan workshops, (ii) restart courses, (iii) workwise and worklink, (iv) 1-2-1, (v) project work and (vi) non-prescribed Government programmes where referral was under a jobseeker's direction. [7733]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[pursuant to his reply, 10 July 1997, c.558]:* Unfortunately not all relevant data was included in the reply provided by Leigh Lewis, chief executive of the Employment Service.

The third, fourth and fifth paragraphs of the reply should have read as follows:

> "Unfortunately, information is not available in the form you request. However, it may be helpful if I explain that a total of 17,477 sanction decisions and opinions were given in 1996–97 for:
>
> refusal of a place on a training scheme or employment programme;
>
> failure to attend a place on a training scheme or employment programme;
>
> giving up a place on a training scheme or employment programme;
>
> losing a place on a training scheme or employment programme through misconduct; and,
>
> neglect to avail of a place on a training scheme or employment programme.

> Schemes and programmes included in this definition are jobplan Workshops, Restart Courses, Workwise, Worklink, 1-2-1, and Project Work. Employment Service statistics do not identify the number of sanctions relating to each programme, nor do they differentiate between two and four week sanctions.
>
> The total number of sanction decisions and opinions given in 1996–97 for refusal or failure to carry out a Jobseeker's Direction was 225. It is not possible to say whether any of these related to employment programmes."

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Hammond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to her answer of 24 July, *Official Report* column *731*, if she will list for each overseas visit the name of the Minister involved, the country visited and the dates of the visit. [11239]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 29 July 1997]:* The information requested is as follows. This includes updated information relating to visits since 2 May and details of a few visits inadvertently omitted from the earlier list.

Minister	*Country of visit*	*Date*
Visits made since 2 May 1997		
Lord Clinton Davis	USA	16–19 May
	South Africa	14–19 June
	Thailand/Malaysia	21–27 June
	France	20–21 July
	Ireland	24–25 July
Mrs. Roche	Brazil	15–19 June
Mr. Griffiths	Greece	25–30 June
Mr. Battle	Azerbaijan	1–3 June
Visits planned for the remainder of 1997		
President	Australia/India	n/a
Lord Clinton-Davis	Chile/Argentina	
	Korea/Japan	
	France	
	Poland/Czech Republic/Hungary	
	Spain	
	Dubai/Yemen	
Visits undertaken by ministers in the year ending 1 May 1997		
President	Russia	27–30 May
	China/Bahrain	30 August to 8 September
	Mexico/USA	12–18 October
	India	8–14 January
	Paris	24–26 January
Mr. Nelson	Sweden	6–7 May
	USA	3–6 June
	Singapore	8–11 July
	Canada	9–12 September
	Taiwan	22–26 September
	Oman	10–15 October
	Germany	23–25 October
	Zimbabwe	4–8 November
	Yemen	14–17 November
	Brazil/Argentina	24–29 November
	Hungary/Poland	16–17 January
	India	12–17 March
	Germany	13–14 April
Lord Fraser	USA/Mexico	5–11 May
	Qatar	17–20 May
	Argentina/Brazil	12–19 June
	Czech Republic	10–12 July
	SE Asia	16–26 September
	Peru/Bolivia	4–8 October
	Turkey	21–23 October
	Azerbaijan	28–30 January
	Norway	5–9 February
	Qatar/Bahrain	25–27 February
	Australia	10–16 March
	Tunisia	14–15 April
Mr. Ian Taylor	Korea	28 September to 3 October
	India	22–29 October
Mr. Page	USA	1–9 September
Mr. John Taylor	Mauritius	21–28 November

Political and Special Advisers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list *(a)* the names, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in her Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2421]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* Sheila Watson, formerly deputy director and consultant economist at the Centre for Local Economic Strategies, and Dan Corry, formerly senior Economist at the Institute for Public Policy Research, are paid special advisers in accordance with schedule 1—part 1—of the "Model Contract for Special Advisers", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. They are both paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and of previous salaries are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

Lord Hollick, chief executive of United News and Media plc—UNM—is an unpaid special adviser, also in accordance with schedule 1—part 1—of the model contract, but excluding all those issues having implications for companies in the UNM group, notably in the broadcasting, publishing and exhibition industry given his continuing role as chief executive of UNM, and also excluding until 1 September issues affecting the aerospace sector given his previous position as a non-executive director of British Aerospace plc.

All three appointments are personal appointments following consultation with the permanent secretary of my Department and the Prime Minister.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what restrictions are placed on the issues her Department's special advisers are permitted to handle and the papers they can see. [10982]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 28 July 1997]:* Sheila Watson and Dan Corry are special advisers on the whole range of DTI business in accordance with schedule 1—part 1—of the "Model Contract for Special Advisers", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. Lord Hollick is an unpaid special adviser, who advises on a range of issues also in accordance with schedule 1—part 1—of the model contract, but excluding all those issues having implications for companies in the UNM Group, notably in the broadcasting, publishing and exhibition industry given his continuing role as chief executive of UNM, and also excluding until 1 September issues affecting the aerospace sector given his previous position as a non-executive director of British Aerospace plc.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the special advisers in her Department, the Minister to whom each is responsible, the subjects on which they advise and the number of advisers in her Department in the year up to 1 May. [5367]

Mrs. Beckett: Sheila Watson and Dan Corry are special advisers to me on the whole range of DTI business in accordance with schedule 1—part 1—of the "Model Contract for Special Advisers", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. Lord Hollick is an unpaid special adviser who advises on a range of issues also in accordance with schedule 1—part 1—of the model contract, but excluding all those issues having implications for companies in the UNM Group notably in the broadcasting, publishing or exhibition industries given his continuing role as chief executive of the United News and Media plc, and also excluding until 1 September issues affecting the aerospace sector given his previous position as a non-executive director of British Aerospace plc. There was one special adviser in the DTI in the year up to 1 May.

Environmental Assessments

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if she will make a statement on current Government environmental assessment requirements; [11970]

(2) what guidance from her Department in respect of environmental impact assessments applies to *(a)* the Fionaven and Schiehallion fields operated by BP and *(b)* any proposed future development at the Atlantic Frontier; and if she will make a statement; [11974]

(3) if she will list the existing independent arbitration arrangements to monitor environmental impact assessments in respect of development at the Atlantic Frontier; [11971]

(4) what plans she has to conduct further environmental impact assessments in respect of development at the Atlantic Frontier; [11972]

(5) pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor), *Official Report*, 23 July, column *627*, if she will set out the procedures currently in place to oversee environmental impact assessments in respect of future development at the Atlantic Frontier. [11969]

Mr. Battle: I will write to my hon. Friend very shortly and place a copy of the letters in the Library of the House.

Arms Industry

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will conduct a survey of the revenue, employment and economic impact accruing from the United Kingdom arms industry. [11824]

Mr. Battle: I will write to the hon. Member very shortly and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Defence Exports

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the premiums paid by United Kingdom defence companies in each of the last 10 years in respect of ECGD cover for defence exports from the United Kingdom. [10304]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 24 July 1997]:* Premium earned in the defence sector for capital good and projects in the last 10 years is as follows:

Year	*Premium earned £ million*
1986–87	18.7
1987–88	8.9
1988–89	24.2
1989–90	13.1
1990–91	17.0
1991–92	10.7
1992–93	40.4
1993–94	37.7
1994–95	10.0
1995–96	23.7

Figures are not yet available for 1996–97.

Figures are not readily available for defence business on short terms of credit insured by ECGD prior to the privatisation of its Insurance Services Group in 1991.

Technology-based Small Firms

Mr. Horam: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what response her Department made to the Bank of England's October 1996 report on the financing of technology-based small firms. [12237]

Mrs. Roche: The Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe, Lord Simon of Highbury, welcomed the Bank of England's report as a very useful contribution to pinpointing the issues associated with the financing of technology-based small firms when speaking in the House of Lords on 19 June 1997 in the debate on the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee's report "The Innovation-Exploitation Barrier".

The Government are now discussing with the Bank of England the recommendations for action in the report.

Engineering (West Midlands)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action she plans to take to increase employment opportunities in engineering in the west midlands. [10324]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 24 July 1997]:* A key factor in increasing employment opportunities in the west midlands, as elsewhere, is a stable, long-term economic framework in which business can plan ahead. That is what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has already begun to provide. I also expect the consultation process I have launched with business as part of the Competitiveness UK initiative to help identify a range of ways in which engineering and other manufacturing business can improve their competitiveness for instance in the area of innovation, exports and the supply chain. The Government office for the west midlands will be participating fully in this with local partners.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Mr. Streeter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action the Council of Ministers will take to enable it to judge whether proposed legislation will hold back the creation and development of small and medium enterprises under article 118 of the treaty of Amsterdam; and if she will make a statement. [11401]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 30 July 1997]:* The article will place a legal obligation on the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers to ensure that directives adopted under it

> "avoid imposing administrative, financial and legal constraints in a way which would hold back the creation and development of small and medium-sized enterprises".

If the Parliament and Council ignored this obligation when adopting a directive, the European Court of Justice could, on application, hold the directive to be invalid.

Gas Installers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will introduce a requirement for gas installers to have public liability insurance. [5434]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Government do not believe that a requirement for public liability insurance by gas installers would be effective in safeguarding consumers. Compulsory insurance would not, of itself, ensure that installers have the necessary skills, competence and hardware to enable them to carry out their duties effectively and safely, which is the first line of defence for consumers. Gas safety legislation requires all gas installers to be registered with the Council of Registered Gas Installers and requires all gas transporters to ensure that their staff undertaking gas safety work meet appropriate standards.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if a public assessment of the impact of the multilateral agreement on investment and its impact on other Government policies will be carried out before the agreement is signed. [11863]

Mrs. Roche: I stressed in the Adjournment debate on the MAI on 23 July that there may be a role for a broad assessment of the impact of the MAI on the environment. Provided that any such proposal will be effective, we will be willing to support it. More broadly, the Government will be happy to participate in discussions on the impact of the agreement.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what oversight Parliament will have over the multilateral agreement on investment and its ratification. [11862]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 24 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *484*.

Motor Insurance Directive

Sir Richard Body: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the current status of proposals for a fourth EU motor directive on motor insurance. [12512]

Mrs. Roche: The European Commission has adopted a proposal for a fourth Council directive on motor liability insurance and transmitted it to the Council and the European Parliament on 14 October 1997. The proposal is intended to assist people making claims for compensation for injury or loss arising from a road accident in another EU member state. It will be deposited in the House for Scrutiny in the normal way.

Development Areas (State Aids)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what procedures are currently in force, and what additional procedures are under review, in order that she can discharge her overall responsibility for state aids in development areas under section 7 of the Industry Act 1972. [12978]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Under section 7 of the Industry Act, regional selective assistance is provided, on a discretionary basis, to investment projects which help to create or safeguard jobs in the designated assisted areas of Great Britain. No additional procedures are under review.

Biotechnology

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the patenting of human genes and tissues. [12840]

Mr. Battle: Interpretation of these criteria is based on jurisprudence.

This Department is also currently undertaking a wide-ranging consultation on the EC's proposed directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions, which could harmonise and clarify national laws on the patenting of biotechnological inventions, so reducing current uncertainty in this area of law in Europe. It is an important initiative in an area where issues of research, ethics and business all need to be taken into account.

Travel Industry

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to make a decision on the Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiry into *(a)* the proposed merger between P and O and Stena and *(b)* vertical integration in the travel industry. [12988]

Mr. Battle: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade gave her on 2 July, *Official Report,* column *181.* The Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the proposed merger between P and O and Stena will be published as soon as is practicable. I cannot comment on the likely publication date of the MMC report or its contents, which remain confidential until publication. Consultation is taking place with the European Commission.

The MMC is required to report to the President of the Board of Trade on the travel trade by 6 November. The report will be published as soon as is practicable.

Retail Newsagents

Mr. Gill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received from retail newsagents relating to their current trading conditions. [12535]

Mr. Battle: Representations have been received from a number of sources including the National Federation of Retail Newsagents and the Multiple Newsagents Association. My hon. Friend the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs has seen the NFRN, and I have also agreed to see it.

Ministerial Endorsements

Mr. Letwin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what circumstances Ministers in her Department are entitled to endorse particular products and services. [12475]

Mr. Ian McCartney: In pursuit of Ministers' policy objectives, the DTI provides support to individual companies in a variety of ways, for example those seeking particular major business overseas, or through its small firms merit award for research and technology—SMART—to innovators. The DTI also makes use of a large number of contractors and advisers in the course of discharging its responsibilities. The existence of these arrangements, while not conferring a ministerial endorsement on the firms in question, is normally a matter of public record and the firms concerned routinely refer to them in their own publicity and promotional material.

Patents (Engineering Products)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures she is taking to prevent the import into Britain and Europe of copies of British engineering products, made in breach of World Patent Organisation rules. [12756]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The importation into the European Union of goods which infringe trade marks, copyright and design rights is prohibited by virtue of Council Regulation 3295/94 provided that the relevant right holder has lodged an application for action with Customs and Excise, which is responsible in the UK for enforcement. The regulation fulfils the obligations of the UK and the EU under the World Trade Organisation—general agreement on tariffs and trade—formerly GATT agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights but its coverage of "counterfeit and pirated goods" does not embrace patent infringements.

Trade Agreements

Angela Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures her Department is taking to ensure consistency in Government policy towards international development within *(a)* bilateral trade agreements and *(b)* multilateral trade agreements. [12282]

Mrs. Roche: My Department works closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and others to ensure that UK development policies are adequately reflected in bilateral and multilateral trade agreements.

Imports (Codes of Conduct)

Angela Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals she has on codes of conduct for British companies importing produce from developing nations. [12314]

Mrs. Roche: My Department is keen to work constructively with companies to establish voluntary codes of conduct with their suppliers both to improve the working conditions under which their products are made and to minimise any adverse impact on the environment. I welcome the moves many of our companies are making towards taking a more ethical stance in business and private sector initiatives such as the ethical trading initiative, which is supported by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Gas Bills

Mr. Webb: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the real level of average household bills for gas in Great Britain as a whole and for each region of Great Britain in each year since 1978. [12830]

Mr. Battle: The data are given in the table.

Average annual household standard credit gas bills[1, 2]: real 1995 prices[3] including VAT

£

	1978	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
British Gas supply zones[5]										
Main zone	347	322	272	310	356	418	412	404	398	378
North	323	298	256	295	352	413	407	400	395	373
Midlands	317	290	250	289	349	407	402	397	391	370

Average annual household standard credit gas bills[1, 2]: real 1995 prices[3] including VAT

£

	1978	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Competitive regions										
Phase 1 (all customers)[6, 7]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Phase 2a (all customers)[6, 7]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Phase 2b (all customers)[6, 7]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Great Britain average	335	309	263	302	354	414	408	402	397	375

£

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*[4]1997*
British Gas supply zones[5]										
Main zone	351	343	341	345	—	—	—	—	—	—
North	349	343	341	345	—	—	—	—	—	—
Midlands	349	343	341	345	—	—	—	—	—	—
Competitive regions										
Phase 1 (all customers)[6, 7]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	316	301
Phase 2a (all customers)[6, 7]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	320	308
Phase 2b (all customers)[6, 7]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	320	306
Great Britain average	351	343	341	345	334	309	315	327	320	309

Source:

Published tariffs.

Notes:

[1] Based on equivalent of standard tariffs of British Gas and other supply companies. Based on an annual consumption of 17,600 kWh.

[2] Bills relate to the total bill received during the year which for credit consumers covers consumption in Q4 of the previous year to Q3 in year in question and includes all tariff changes and rebates.

[3] Real prices are cash prices adjusted for inflation as measured by the GDP market price deflator.

[4] 1997 bills are provisional in that they only include tariff changes announced up to August 1997 and therefore may be subject to revision if tariff changes occur. The 1997 deflator is an estimate and as such revisions may lead to changes in the real terms bill.

[5] Supply zones are defined as Main: Scottish, North Thames, South Eastern, Eastern, Southern, Wales and South Western; North: North Eastern, North Western and Northern; Midlands: East and West.

[6] Bills for the various trial competition regions are calculated so as to include the fact that those customers who switched supplier would have received their gas, prior to switching, from British Gas and charged BG tariffs for this gas. For example, the Phase 2a and 2b bills are based on the assumption that customers who switched in Phase 2a received gas supply from the new supplier from 10 February 1997, and for Phase 2b from 7 March 1997. Prior to these dates the customers are taken to be on British Gas tariffs (e.g. national or main zone).

[7] Phase 1 covers Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, Phase 2a covers the County of Avon and Dorset and Phase 2b covers Kent and East and West Sussex.

Electricity Bills

Mr. Webb: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the real level of average household bills for electricity in Great Britain as a whole and for each region of Great Britain in each year since 1978. [12833]

Mr. Battle: The available data are given in the table.

Average annual household standard credit electricity bills [1, 2, 3, 4]: real 1995 prices[5] including VAT

£

	1978	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Eastern Electricity	n/a	n/a	346	n/a	338	321	312	306	298	n/a
East Midlands Electricity	n/a	n/a	335	n/a	338	329	320	317	316	n/a
London Electricity	n/a	n/a	383	n/a	384	364	355	342	322	n/a
MANWEB	n/a	n/a	364	n/a	369	350	342	339	334	n/a
Midlands Electricity	n/a	n/a	346	n/a	354	336	327	325	316	n/a
Northern Electric	n/a	n/a	355	n/a	354	336	329	323	312	n/a
NORWEB	n/a	n/a	339	n/a	351	333	325	322	316	n/a
SEEBOARD	n/a	n/a	350	n/a	351	340	330	325	312	n/a
Southern Electric	n/a	n/a	337	n/a	347	326	317	306	298	n/a
SWALEC	n/a	n/a	359	n/a	369	350	342	334	325	n/a
SWEB	n/a	n/a	364	n/a	371	348	338	333	316	n/a
Yorkshire Electricity	n/a	n/a	344	n/a	354	333	324	320	316	n/a
Hydro-Electric	n/a	n/a	311	n/a	310	295	294	289	286	n/a
Scottish Power	n/a	n/a	304	n/a	309	293	294	290	287	n/a
Great Britain average[6]	n/a	n/a	348	n/a	352	335	325	322	313	n/a

£

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996[6]	1997
Eastern Electricity	291	278	280	289	297	288	275	291	282	279
East Midlands Electricity	300	287	289	297	306	298	296	300	276	258
London Electricity	311	298	301	313	318	299	304	302	290	275
MANWEB	325	311	314	322	329	321	313	323	313	288
Midlands Electricity	306	293	295	304	309	297	282	294	284	267
Northern Electric	307	294	301	315	325	302	315	308	296	279
NORWEB	300	288	290	298	304	296	291	277	273	255
SEEBOARD	304	291	294	303	310	300	288	289	275	259
Southern Electric	299	287	290	299	306	298	294	294	286	260
SWALEC	318	306	314	331	337	327	330	337	325	306
SWEB	319	307	313	325	333	320	326	322	309	280
Yorkshire Electricity	308	296	300	305	309	298	284	297	277	248
Hydro-Electric	280	270	276	282	289	285	285	289	284	268
Scottish Power	280	271	276	281	285	277	290	295	289	269
Great Britain average[8]	304	291	294	303	310	298	294	298	286	269

Source:

Electricity Association—1980 to 1988; DTI—1989 to 1997, based on published tariffs and rebates from Public Electricity Suppliers.

Notes:

[1] Based on an annual consumption of 3,300kWh.

[2] Bills from 1989 include all tariff changes and rebates but exclude discounts offered by some companies for prompt payment.

[3] Data from 1989 relates to the total bill received during the year, which for credit consumers covers consumption in Q4 of previous year to Q3 in year in question. Specific bills based on tariffs at 1 April are used pre 1989.

[4] Data pre 1989 and post 1988 are calculated on different basis and so are not directly comparable, but do reflect the overall trend.

[5] Real prices are cash prices adjusted for the effects of inflation as measured by the GDP market price deflator.

[6] 1996 bills exclude the National Grid Discount. Customers in England and Wales received a one-off rebate of £54.60 (including VAT) during Q1 1996, following the flotation of the National Grid Company.

[7] 1997 bills are provisional in that they are based on tariffs as at end August 1997. Information for the year may change (for example with rebates) further changes will occur as revisions are made to the current estimate of the 1997 GDP deflator.

[8] From 1989, averages are weighted by the number of domestic customers in 1994–95, prior to which data [illegible] each year are used.

Telephone Bills

Mr. Webb: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the real level of average household telephone bills in Great Britain as a whole and for each region of Great Britain in each year since 1978. [12832]

Mrs. Roche: The first table gives an index of BT's telephone charges for the period of 1978–79 to 1988–89, since values for these years are not readily available. From 1988–89, BT started providing values for the median residential bill, which unlike the first set of figures relates to actual use and provides the most accurate view of an average bill. Values for these for 1988 to 1996 are shown in the second table. Statistics for each region of Great Britain are not available. Figures for other operators are not available.

1. Index of quarterly telephone charges including VAT for the period 1978–79 to 1988–89

Year	Great Britain
1978–79	100
1979–80	92.6
1980–81	102.4
1981–82	110.9
1982–83	110.2
1983–84	105.6
1984–85	104.9
1985–86	105.3
1986–87	106.5
1987–88	104.4
1988–89	99.1

2. Quarterly median residential bill. Value in £ since 1989–90, excluding VAT, deflated by the all items retail prices index and expressed in 1995–96 prices

	£
1989–90	47.64
1990–91	48.15
1991–92	48.44
1992–93	48.99
1993–94	49.38
1994–95	50.55
1995–96	48.67
1996–97	47.69

The above figures make it look as if prices have not changed in real terms since the late 1980s. These figures do not however take account of increased use of the telephone throughout the period.

Supply Teachers

Dr. Vis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will instigate an investigation into the businesses that supply supply-teaching staff. [12868]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My Department's employment agency standards inspectorate is responsible for regulating businesses providing supply teaching staff under the terms of the Employment Agencies Act 1973. In addition to investigating complaints, proactive checks of standards in this and other sectors of the industry are conducted from time to time. Any information about suspected breaches of the legislation should be brought to my Department's attention.

Footwear Imports

Ms Keeble: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what plans he has to impose anti-dumping duties on footwear imported from *(a)* Thailand, *(b)* Indonesia and *(c)* China; [12345]

(2) what action the Government plan to take over the dumping in the United Kingdom of footwear from China, Indonesia and Thailand. [12288]

Mrs. Roche: Definitive anti-dumping measures may be imposed only by the Council of the European Union, acting on a recommendation from the European Commission and by a simple majority of member states. They then apply to all imports of the product from the countries concerned into the EU.

In the case of leather and synthetic footwear from China, Indonesia and Thailand, it seems likely that the Council will agree to a minimum price regime in November. The duty payable would be equivalent to the difference between a minimum price and the import price, where the import price is lower.

In the case of footwear with textile uppers from China and Indonesia, the Commission has put forward a proposal for duties on which discussions continue.

SCOTLAND

Hospital Beds

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of staffed beds projected in the published Lothian health acute strategy for *(a)* all hospitals in the Lothian health board area, *(b)* the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh trust and *(c)* the West Lothian NHS trust. [12748]

Mr. Galbraith: Lothian health board's 1993 public consultation document on the acute services strategy indicated that following implementation of the proposals there were expected to be 2,042 acute hospital beds—excluding obstetrics, special care baby unit, geriatric assessment and elderly continuing care beds—within the new royal infirmary, Western general and St. John's hospitals.

Total projected bed numbers—excluding only continuing care elderly beds—for the new royal infirmary and St. John's hospital were 942 and 654 respectively.

Since consultation, Lothian health board has continued to refine and revise its plans in consultation with the trusts, and relevant clinicians.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of staffed beds by specialty for the latest date for which information is available for *(a)* all hospitals in the Lothian health board area, *(b)* the Royal infirmary of Edinburgh trust and *(c)* the West Lothian NHS trust. [12747]

Mr. Galbraith: The information is set out in the table.

NHSIS—Average available staffed beds; Lothian Health area: Quarter ending 30 June 1997[1]

	Lothian Health area	*Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS trust*	*West Lothian NHS trust*
All specialties	4,928	1,027	842
General Medicine	407	146	101
Cardiology	56	35	—
Communicable Diseases	—	—	—
Dermatology	19	19	—
Endocrinology and Diabetes	3	—	—
Gastroenterology	45	22	2
Geriatric Medicine	1,143	110	161
Medical Oncology	18	—	—
Medical Paediatrics	115	37	30
Nephrology	33	33	—
Neurology	35	—	—
Rehabilitation Medicine	84	—	—
Respiratory Medicine	87	56	—
Rheumatology	14	—	—
General Surgery	98	—	56
General Surgery (excluding Vascular)	174	106	—
Vascular Surgery	38	38	—
Anaesthetics	29	10	4
Cardiothoracic Surgery	33	33	—
Thoracic Surgery	26	26	—
Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT)	37	24	6
Neurosurgery	48	—	—
Ophthalmology	21	20	—
Orthopaedics	222	172	38
Plastic Surgery	51	10	32
Surgical Paediatrics	24	—	—
Urology	60	—	4
Oral Surgery	1	—	—
Paediatric Dentistry	—	—	—
GP Other than Obstetrics	32	—	11
Gynaecology	69	30	17
Obstetrics	164	83	44
General Psychiatry (Mental Illness)	643	—	201
Child Psychiatry	—	—	—
Adolescent Psychiatry	6	—	6
Forensic Psychiatry	34	—	—
Psychiatry of Old Age	708	—	123
Learning Disability (Mental Handicap)	252	—	—
Diagnostic Radiology	—	—	—
Clinical Oncology	52	—	—
Haematology	28	—	4
Unspecified[2]	19	16	2

[1] Provisional.

[2] Beds allocated as "unspecified" are not allocated to any particular specialty, and are lent to specialties on demand.

Lothian Health Board (Acute Services)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has assessed in respect of changes to the Lothian health acute services strategy; when proposed revisions will be made available for public consultation; and when the acute services strategy will be implemented in full. [12751]

Mr. Galbraith: It is estimated that Lothian health board's acute services strategy will be implemented in full once the new royal infirmary of Edinburgh is operating, currently expected to be in 2003. Scottish Office officials are in regular contact with Lothian health board and the relevant trusts so that they are aware of any revisions to the original proposals within the acute services strategy. I would be informed of, and assess appropriately, any revisions which substantially affected the objectives or implementation of the strategy.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will make available a detailed analysis of the costs associated with specific projects of all proposed health service PFI contracts in Scotland. [12749]

Mr. Galbraith: NHS trusts responsible for individual PFI projects account for the costs they incur in pursuing them. The Scottish Office management executive estimates that costs should not be more than 1.5 per cent. of the capital value of the project.

WALES

Devolution

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the cost to public funds of sending literature to every home in Wales on the Government's devolution proposals. [12722]

Mr. Ron Davies: The cost was under £164,000.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the net cost of producing the White Paper on the Government's proposals for a Welsh Assembly. [12717]

Mr. Davies: The net cost was £77,480.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many civil servants currently work in the Welsh Office; and how many he estimates will work in the Welsh Office after the implementation of his devolution proposals. [12689]

Mr. Davies: The Welsh Office currently employs 2,224 full-time equivalent staff. This figures includes 140 casual staff.

My estimate of the number employed by the Welsh Office after establishment of the Welsh Assembly is set out in paragraph 4.45 of the White Paper "A Voice for Wales", copies of which are available in the Vote Office.

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which his Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12568]

Mr. Ron Davies: The functions of the Welsh Office for which payments are made are set out in the Department's supply estimates and appropriation accounts—class XIV, votes 1 to 5. Payments for all functions are handled centrally and the cost of the central finance payment processing for 1996–97 is estimated at £492,000.

MRSA and Tuberculosis

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of *(a)* Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus and *(b)* tuberculosis have been recorded in each health authority district in Wales in each month since April 1997. [12910]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information is given in the following table:

MRSA and tuberculosis[1]

	April	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*
Laboratory confirmed cases of MRSA in Wales[2]						
North Wales	85	69	75	64	53	60
Dyfed Powys	27	17	25	28	15	27
Morgannwg	112	104	90	141	124	110
Bro Taf	210	202	196	196	185	89
Gwent	40	44	64	94	52	49
Wales	474	436	450	523	429	335
Notifications of tuberculosis[3]						
North Wales	—	6	9	3	5	8
Dyfed Powys	3	6	6	3	—	1
Morgannwg	6	4	5	—	1	—
Bro Taf	7	6	8	6	1	18
Gwent	—	—	—	2	1	1
Wales	16	22	28	14	8	28

Source:

Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre Wales (CDSC).

[1] Data for recent months are provisional.

[2] Patients identified with MRSA (ethicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus); only a proportion of these will have clinical illness. Screening and reporting practices may differ from hospital to hospital. The date is the date specimen was received by the hospital. The health authority is the area of residence of the patient or area of reporting laboratory if area of residence of patient is not known.

[3] Electronic reports to CDSC Wales.

Performing Arts (Welsh Language)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to promote the use of the Welsh language in the performing arts; and if he will make a statement. [12914]

Mr. Ron Davies: I am pleased that both the Arts Council of Wales and the Welsh Language Board support productions in Welsh—the Arts Council of Wales through its drama programmes, community touring scheme and other activities; the Welsh Language Board through support for the national eisteddfod of Wales and the Urdd national eisteddfod.

Health Trusts (Deficits)

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of *(a)* the current deficits and *(b)* the projected deficits of each health trust as a percentage of their budgets; and if he will make a statement. [12963]

Mr. Win Griffiths: As at August 1997, the following trusts were reporting either a current and/or projected end of year deficit position(s):

	Current £000s	*Projected £000s*
Carmarthen	(441)	(1,659)
Ceredigion	(414)	(1,401)
East Glamorgan	(142)	(342)
Glan y Mor	(10)	0
Glan Hafren	(265)	0
Gwent Community	(473)	66
Llandough Hospital and Community	(690)	(1,648)
Llanelli/Dinefwr	(447)	(1,095)
Morriston	(1,309)	(3,159)
Nevill Hall and District	(156)	(509)
North Glamorgan	657	(737)
Pembs/Derwen	(1,122)	(2.697)
Powys	(646)	(1,403)
UHW Healthcare	(954)	(6,000)
Wrexham	(715)	(737)

The position of some trusts may improve as contract negotiations are completed, and these deficits project worse case scenarios. My officials are in discussion with trusts to ensure that these problems are being dealt with.

It is not possible to provide the figures as a percentage of their budget, as most trusts have not yet reached contract agreement with all their purchasers.

Transplants

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many *(a)* kidney, *(b)* heart, *(c)* lung, *(d)* heart and lung, *(e)* liver and *(f)* other transplants have been carried out in Wales in each of the last 10 years, broken down into health authority district; and if he will make a statement; [12912]

(2) how many transplants involving artificial organs have been carried out in Wales in each of the last 10 years, broken down into health authority district; and if he will make a statement. [12913]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Information on the number of transplants performed on Welsh residents by area of residence is not readily available. The number of transplants carried out in Wales as a whole is shown in the following table. Transplants of organs not listed in the table are not carried out in Wales. It should be noted that kidney transplants for residents of north Wales are normally carried out in Liverpool. No data are available centrally concerning artificial organ transplants.

Organ transplants carried out in Wales

	Kidney	*Kidney/ pancreas*	*Whole pancreas*	*Cornea*
1987	71	—	3	26
1988	70	1	2	26
1989	65	1	1	53
1990	62	1	—	83
1991	79	3	—	61
1992	65	8	—	98
1993	65	1	—	94
1994	94	2	—	104
1995	81	2	—	95
1996	90	—	—	98

Source:

United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority.

Organ Donors

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate how many and what percentage of people in Wales (i) carry a donor card and (ii) are registered on the NHS organ donor register. [12911]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The number of people carrying organ donor cards is not known centrally. There were 390 thousand Welsh residents on the NHS organ donor register at 18 October 1997, about 13 per cent. of the population.

Health Authorities (Finance)

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of *(a)* the running costs of and *(b)* the remuneration paid by each health authority in Wales in the current financial year. [12964]

Mr. Win Griffiths: This information is not presently available.

Health authorities' costs and the remuneration paid to their chairmen, non-executive and executive directors in 1996–97 were as shown in the following table:

£000

	Health authority costs	*Directors' remuneration*
Bro Taf	11,807	316
Dyfed/Powys	5,530	394
Gwent	5,792	310
Morgannwy	5,024	413
North Wales	6,879	400
Total	35,032	1,833

Source:

Health authorities annual accounts.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Beef Exports (South Africa)

Barbara Follett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the total percentage reduction agreed since August 1996 by the European Commission in the level of beef export refunds to South Africa. [12332]

Mr. Rooker: The level of export refund EU beef exports received is dependant not only on the destination, but also the type of cut. Since August 1996, the level of export refunds on beef exports to South Africa has fallen by between 35 per cent. and 43 per cent.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the report on the effects of EU beef export subsidies on the Southern African livestock economy commissioned by the South African Government from Natal university. [12333]

Mr. Rooker: We are aware of the report and have noted its contents. As mentioned in my reply to my hon. Friend's previous question, there has already been a large reduction in the level of refunds paid on beef exports to South Africa. We believe however that it is still too early to assess the full impact of these reductions.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when will the EU Council of Ministers next debate beef export subsidies to South Africa; and if he will make a statement. [12334]

Mr. Rooker: We know of no current plans to discuss beef export refunds to South Africa in the Agriculture Council.

EU-Senegal Fisheries Agreement

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the nationality of the fishermen and their projected generated financial gain covered in the European Union-Senegal fisheries agreement; what is the cost to the European Union; what is the financial share of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's position regarding fishing rights held by the European Union in third-party waters. [12500]

Mr. Morley: The fishing opportunities available under the EC-Senegal fisheries agreement are allocated mainly to fishermen from France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece who have traditionally fished in Senegalese waters. However, new pelagic fishing opportunities obtained under the new protocol have not been allocated to specific member states. We have no information on the projected financial gain by individual fishermen.

The cost of the agreement to the EU budget is 12 mecu per annum. The UK contributes some 15 per cent. of this amount.

The Government consider fisheries agreements with third countries to be important in safeguarding traditional fishing grounds for EU fishermen. The agreements with Norway and other North Atlantic countries, for example, are important to the UK distant water fleet. However, the Government wish to ensure that fisheries agreements as a whole provide value for money, promote sustainable fisheries and are coherent with general EU development policy.

Dietary Supplements

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library the reports which he received from the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Goods and the Environment and the Food Advisory Committee before he made his decision of 4 July to limit the level of vitamin B6 in dietary supplements. [12310]

Mr. Rooker: The statements from the Committee on Toxicology of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment and the Food Advisory Committee have been placed in the Library of the House. They have been available in the public domain since 4 July.

Fishing Fleet

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact of the integration of Agenda 2000 countries into the European Union on the United Kingdom fishing fleet. [12526]

Mr. Morley: It will not be possible to carry out a detailed assessment of the impact on the UK fishing fleet of integrating new countries into the EU until we know which countries are to be admitted and the accession terms proposed. However, those applicant countries which have marine fishing interests generally fish in areas, such as the Baltic sea, where the UK fleet is not active. Previous new entrants have, as part of their accession terms, been allocated quotas reflecting the areas and stocks for which they have historic track records. The Government will wish to ensure that similar conditions apply to further new entrants.

Scientific Committees

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department approved the establishment of additional scientific committees as announced in European Union document ip/97/679; how those committees will co-ordinate their work with committees responsible to his Department; and if he will make a statement. [12744]

Mr. Rooker: The European Commission has recently transferred all of its advisory scientific committees to Directorate General XXIV which deals with consumer policy and consumer health protection. It is now in the process of restructuring the committees, the six existing committees being replaced by eight new committees which will deal respectively with food; animal nutrition; animal health and animal welfare; veterinary public health; plants; cosmetic products and non-food products intended for consumers; toxicity, ecotoxicity and the environment; and medical products and medical devices. A restructured overarching committee, the Scientific Steering Committee, is also being set up, the membership consisting of the chairmen of the eight scientific committees and eight additional scientists.

The reorganisation of the committee structure is entirely a matter for the European Commission, but in so far as the intention is to provide a more effective advisory system we are in support, though it remains to be seen how the new arrangements will operate in practice. Advice on food safety issues in the UK continues to be provided by the UK advisory committees, although increasingly legislation on food safety is based on agreements reached in Brussels.

Officials have been in touch with officials in DG XXIV and will continue working to ensure that there is effective interchange of information between the EU and ourselves. We also keep in close touch with day to day developments in the EU scientific committees via the UK contact points, and EU committees will be well aware of the conclusions reached in UK discussions.

EU Expenditure

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give a breakdown of expenditure by country under European Union document 9201/97. [12593]

Mr. Rooker: Document 9201/97 concerns a Commission proposal to augment funding for the quality beef promotion scheme by up to 20 mecu. However, as this proposal has not yet been agreed by the Council, expenditure has not yet been allocated. Should the proposal be adopted, it is expected that a breakdown of expenditure by sponsoring member state and by the implementing trade or inter-trade organisation, will be available in due course. Organisations may, however, operate in more than one member state.

Aerial Spraying

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will review the regulations governing the aerial spraying of bracken to ensure the maximum safety and convenience of residents. [12761]

Mr. Rooker: The Control of Pesticide Regulations 1986 include general requirements for the use of pesticides, including aerial spraying, and were updated earlier this year. The amending regulations introduced a specific requirement on all users of pesticides to confine the application of the pesticide to the land, crop, structure material or other area intended to be treated. These regulations place obligations on the aerial spray operator to give notice of the intended aerial application to the chief health officer for the district; hospitals, schools and other institutions within 150 m of the intended flight path; and occupants or their agents of all property within 25 m of the boundary of the land to which the pesticide is to be applied.

These requirements will be emphasised in the revised code of practice for the safe use of pesticides on farms and holdings which will be published early in the new year.

BSE

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish figures to show the incidence of BSE *(a)* in mainland Britain and *(b)* in the Channel Islands among (i) Jersey cows and (ii) other breeds. [12764]

Mr. Rooker: The number of confirmed cases of BSE in Jersey and non-Jersey cattle in Great Britain as at 21 October 1997 are as follows:

	Number
Jersey	1,472
Jersey cross breeds	147
Non-Jersey	167,640
Total	169,259

These figures include cases reported before the 1988 BSE order.

Channel Islands authorities compile their own BSE statistics, which they supply to MAFF. My Department receives only cumulative figures of confirmed cases, the most recent being:

	Number	*As at*
Jersey	132	10 October 1997
Guernsey	648	19 October 1997
Alderney	2	26 June 1995

For logistical reasons not all suspects slaughtered on Guernsey have been subjected to laboratory confirmation of disease. Some have been confirmed solely on the basis of clinical signs.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will instigate a new public inquiry into the BSE affair. [12967]

Mr. Rooker: The Government are considering the question of a public inquiry into BSE very carefully and will make an announcement when they have reached a conclusion.

Factory-farmed Produce

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to ensure that factory-farmed produce is identifiable by package labelling; and if he will make a statement. [12930]

Mr. Rooker: The Government have no plans at present to make such information a mandatory part of the food label, but we are consulting interested parties on the Farm Animal Welfare Council's recommendation for compulsory labelling of egg production systems.

Genetically Engineered Food

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has undertaken into the allergenic potential of genetically engineered food; and if he will make a statement. [12896]

Mr. Rooker: The EC Novel Foods Regulation (258/97) introduced an EU wide pre-market approval system for genetically modified foods. In the UK the independent Advisory Committee for Novel Foods and Processes assesses the safety of such foods paying particular attention to their allergenic potential. This Department funds research work worth some £1 million per year, to underpin the ACNFP's safety assessment procedures. It is standard practice to encourage the publication of results from such research.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Bull Bars

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will advocate an EU-wide ban on bull bars during the British presidency of the Council of Transport Ministers in January 1998. [12321]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The UK has already made its opposition to aggressive bull bars very clear to our European partners, and has strongly supported the Commission's proposal for tackling them through an amendment to the external projections directive. However, the opposition to this initiative from certain member states has demonstrated that if we are to tackle the bull bar problem quickly we will have to take action at a national, rather than a European, level.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he intends to take to control the use of bull bars. [12322]

Ms Jackson: We have concluded that we must look seriously at tackling aggressive bull bars at a national level. We are currently consulting widely on options for action with the aim of identifying a way forward that is both practicable and effective.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if, in assessing housing properties for compulsory competitive tendering purposes, the 4,000 de minimis threshold will apply to properties managed via management agreements, by *(a)* estate management boards, and *(b)* tenant management organisations. [12008]

Mr. Raynsford: The Minister for Local Government and Housing announced on 25 July that the proposed de minimis threshold for housing management compulsory competitive tendering should be stock based at 4,000 properties. There are no proposals to make any changes to the current definition of a local authority's housing stock. The definition as it stands includes most stock which a local authority provides under part II of the Housing Act 1985. Only hostels and flats which have been bought under the right-to-buy scheme are excluded. Therefore any properties which are managed by either estate management boards or tenant management organisations will count towards the de minimis calculation.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to end the capping of local authority spending. [12009]

Mr. Raynsford: We remain committed to the abolition of crude and universal capping as soon as possible. We are now working on a wide range of proposals to improve local accountability which will allow us to fulfil this commitment.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has *(a)* to exclude supplementary credit approvals under the Local Government Finance (Supplementary Credit Approval) Bill from capping rates and *(b)* to allow SCAs to be used in respect of private housing stock. [12010]

Mr. Raynsford: Ministers have yet to take decisions on capping arrangements for 1998–99. We anticipate making an announcement later in the year.

Guidance to local authorities on expenditure under the capital receipts initiative was issued on 2 October. This sets out how the additional resources released under the initiative can be applied. In the first instance, it will be for individual local authorities to identify local needs and priorities and to draw up strategies to tackle them. Where private sector renewal is such a priority, capital receipts initiative resources will be available to support remedial works.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans his Department has to allow the private finance initiative to be used for housing purposes; and what account is taken of private finance initiative projects in relation to the capping of local government expenditure. [12011]

Mr. Raynsford: Local authorities are already developing pilot schemes for the provision of non housing revenue account housing under PFI. My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing recently agreed to the launch of a pathfinder project for the use of the PFI in housing revenue account housing during the third reading of the Local Government Contracts Bill. *Official Report,* 8 July, column *831*. In the context of the 1997–98 capping round, the previous Administration adjusted the capping regime to allow amounts of revenue support stemming from private finance credits to be spent. We will announce capping guidelines for 1998–99 later in the autumn. In the longer term, we have repeated our commitment to end crude and universal capping as soon as possible.

European Environment Agency

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the definition of *(a)* media-oriented and *(b)* source-oriented monitoring as named as an element of the 1997 work programme for the European Environment Agency; what the projects involved are; how much has been allocated to each; and if he will make a statement. [12508]

Angela Eagle: In the context of the European Environment Agency's work programme, media-oriented monitoring concerns the assessment of the state and trends of the environment by looking at the quality of the various areas of the environment—air, water, nature and soil. Source-oriented monitoring provides an assessment of the pressures on the environment by way of measuring the levels of pollution by source.

The EEA's work programme for 1997 gives an estimated total budget allocation of 2.75 million ecu for the media- oriented monitoring projects, and 800,000 ecu for the source-oriented monitoring projects. The two tables provide a more detailed breakdown by project. A number of UK organisations are partners in some of the consortia carrying out elements of this work programme.

Media oriented monitoring. Assessment of the state and trends of the environment

Project number	*Project title*	*Budget 000 ecu*
MW3	Design of a freshwater monitoring network	540
MW4	European freshwater monitoring network and databases	
MW5	Water resources evaluation	
MW6	Information on coastal and marine water quality	340
MW7	Coastal pressure and state indicators	
MA2	European air quality monitoring network and databases—establishment and maintenance	390
MA3	Harmonisation in the use of models for ambient air quality and pollution dispersion/transport	
MA4	Ambient noise levels and exposure	50
MN2	State and trends of biodiversity in Europe	590
MN3	Support to NATURA 2000 network	
MN4	Landcover—ecological monitoring	390
MN5	Forest conditions—monitoring network and databases	60

Media oriented monitoring. Assessment of the state and trends of the environment

Project number	*Project title*	*Budget 000 ecu*
MS2	Soil characteristics, monitoring and mapping	390
MS3	Methodologies for inventories of contaminated sites	
	Total	2,750

Source oriented monitoring. Assessment of pressures

Project number	*Project title*	*Budget 000 ecu*
SG1	Common tools for emissions and waste integrated inventories	50
SA2	Air emissions inventories '90 and '94	400
SW1	Emissions to water—general approach and assessment	DGXI funded
SWS2	Waste—pilot projects for further assessments of inventories and analysis of main flows	350
	Total	800

A43

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what has been the average daily flow of traffic on the A43 through Silverstone over each of the last 10 years; what proportion of this flow is represented by heavy goods vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [12262]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Highways Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Tim Boswell, dated 27 October 1997:

The Minister for Transport in London has asked me to reply to your recent question about traffic on the A43 through Silverstone over the past ten years.

The annual average daily flow at Silverstone in 1996 was 20,500 vehicles with 17 per cent. commercial vehicles including buses. Traffic is regularly monitored on A43 between Wood Burcote turn and the A413 (Annex A). Figures for that site are shown at Annex B.

A comparison of the 1996 figures show that the flow at the monitoring site is some 17 per cent. higher than the flow through Silverstone.

Ten year average daily traffic flow figures. A43 through Silverstone

Year	*AADF*	*Per cent. commercial AADF*
1987	17,400	18
1988	19,200	—
1989	19,700	—
1990	21,100	16
1991	18,400	15
1992	23,400	—
1993	22,700	16
1994	22,200	—
1995	22,300	—
1996	24,100	15

Broadcasting Masts

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance he has issued to local authorities in connection with the determination of planning applications for broadcasting masts and transmitting stations. [12494]

Mr. Raynsford: Current planning policy guidance on broadcasting masts and transmitting stations is set out in planning policy guidance note 8—PPG8 revised December 1992. That guidance reflects the importance we attach to keeping to a minimum the number of broadcasting and telecommunications masts, and of sites for such installations, while ensuring that there is an effective national broadcasting and telecommunications network.

Conservation Areas

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for the creation of conservation areas and nature reserves in Britain; and what proposals he has to encourage local authorities towards the creation and management of such sites. [12498]

Angela Eagle: Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 the conservation agencies have powers to declare national nature reserves. There are now 188 NNRs in England. English Nature, the Government's scientific adviser, has been actively seeking to involve local authorities and other approved bodies in the management of NNRs. It has also assisted local authorities in increasing the number of local nature reserves from 288 in 1991 to 566 in 1997.

Motability (Fuel Tax Exemptions)

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce a fuel tax exemption for those disabled people who have motability vehicles. [12299]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There are no plans to introduce a fuel tax exemption for those disabled people who have motability vehicles. Such a measure would be administratively expensive and impractical, and there are better ways of assisting disabled people with their transport costs. The main way is through the Government's provision of the disability living allowance which was introduced in 1992 to help people with the extra costs which arise from their care and mobility needs. DLA is increased every year, by law, by the rate of inflation, as measured by the movement in the retail prices index which takes account of the cost of petrol as well as the cost of taxi fares and other motoring costs.

Road Bridges

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those requirements of European legislation on axle weights which require strengthening of road bridges; and the cost of strengthening road bridges to the required standard. [12461]

Ms Glenda Jackson: When the United Kingdom's derogation from certain of the European Community weight limits in directive 96/53/EEC, previously

85/3/EEC, expires on 31 December 1998, we will allow an increase in the drive axle weight limit for vehicles on international journeys form 10.5 to 11.5 tonnes.

For the trunk road network the Highways Agency has an assessment and strengthening programme aimed at ensuring all the bridges meet or are brought up to meet modern standards. The latest estimate of the cost of this programme is £450 million and includes some additional costs for meeting the slightly higher requirements of European legislation. Figures are not available to estimate this additional cost.

Until local authorities have completed the assessment of their bridge stock, it will not be possible to determine accurately the cost of strengthening bridges on local roads to enable them also to carry the heavier 40 tonne lorries. It has, however, been made clear to local authorities that not all bridges on all roads need to carry such vehicles.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will investigate the possibility of using redundant North sea oil and gas drilling platforms in the construction of new road bridges. [12286]

Ms Jackson: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Highways Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Lawrie Haynes. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Bob Blizzard, dated 27 October 1997:

> The Minister for Transport in London has asked me to respond to your Parliamentary Question on the possibility of using redundant North Sea oil and gas drilling platforms in the construction of new bridges.
>
> Most new bridges are constructed of steel, (steel) reinforced concrete, or a combination of both. The exact type of bridge is usually dictated by cost, aesthetics, the road geometry and the loads that the bridge will have to carry. To achieve the most effective design, the shape and strength of the various components are specifically designed and it is not often that "second hand" components can be incorporated without significant cost. However, second-hand materials can often be used quite economically after they have been recycled. For example, all the steel bars produced in the UK for reinforced concrete are made from recycled scrap steel.
>
> Crushed concrete can be used again as an aggregate for concrete but generally it is not suitable for making the high strength concrete needed in bridges. Recycled concrete from drilling platforms is also likely to be contaminated with salt which will cause the steel reinforcement to corrode unless special measures are taken.
>
> It is therefore difficult to see how steel or concrete from redundant North Sea oil and gas drilling platforms could be used economically, directly in new bridges. However, salvaged steel from North Sea platforms has already been used in temporary works and we are continuing to carry out research into finding more ways of using recycled materials including concrete.

EU Life Environment

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what United Kingdom projects are funded by European Union Life Environment moneys; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [12506]

Angela Eagle: Since the inception of the European Union LIFE programme in 1992, Life Environment, which is administered by the European Commission, has supported 70 projects in the United Kingdom, providing total funding of around 35 million.

Under Phase 2 of the LIFE programme, which began last year and runs until 1999, 16 United Kingdom projects have so far successfully applied for funding. Theses projects, and the Community funding they have been awarded, are as listed.

Proposer	*Title of project*	*Ecu*
1996		
Dorset County Council	Coastal Zone Management: development of a strategy for an open coast	199,361
BIP Group Ltd	The use of a novel biological treatment for reductio of VOC emissions to air	149,377
University of Ulster	Implementing alternative strategies for sustainable beach and dune management	630,403
City of Edinburgh	The Forth Estuary: a demonstration of effective integrated costal zone management	143,617
Buckinghamshire College	Tourfor: integrated tourism with the development of forest resources	325,122
BOC Plc	The sanitisation and recirculation of water in the processing of poultry	228,097
Isle of Wight Council	Demonstration project on integrated costal zone management	151,809
1997		
Arun District Council	An investigation into the survival of sewage indicating organisms discharged to the marine environment159,883	
London Borough of Southwark	Local Indicators to Monitor Urban Sustainability (LITMUS)	498,966
London Borough of Camden	'Plusbus Interactive'—a scheme for access and availability of special transport for all	937,443
Subterra Ltd	An environmentally friendly repair system for leaking sewage or rainwater/surface drainage pipes	274,546
SATRA	Recycling of waste leather from footwear and other industries	411,861
Highland Council	Area sustainability strategies for peripheral rural areas	492,458
BIP Group Ltd.	The use of a novel absorption process for the reduction of VOC emissions to air	296,275
Isle of Wight Council	Coastal change, Climate and Instability	610,124
Broads Authority	New Wetlands Harvest—sustainable wetlands management	491,910

Asbestos

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures the Government are taking to encourage the replacement of asbestos in industrial applications. [12285]

Angela Eagle: All uses of blue and brown asbestos and certain uses of white asbestos are prohibited. The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987, as amended in 1992, require that employers substitute safer alternatives instead of using asbestos where it is practicable to do so.

The Government are determined to make current legislation more effective and to introduce new measures, including extending the present bans. The advice of the Health and Safety Commission is being sought on all these matters.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will strengthen protection and conservation measures for sites of special scientific interest. [12499]

Angela Eagle: We are actively taking forward the commitment to increase protection for wildlife and have proposed a review of the mechanisms for protection and maintaining SSSIs. Officials are currently undertaking preliminary discussions on this important issue.

Birds

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to reverse the decline of previously common hedgerow, woodland and farmland species of bird life. [12497]

Angela Eagle: The Government have taken positive steps to help reverse the decline in common hedgerow, woodland and farmland bird species. They include:

A biodiversity steering group report, published in December 1995, contained costed action plans for bird species, including the song thrush and skylark, and costed habitat action plans for cereal field margins, lowland wet grassland and other important bird habitats. Further costed action plans for other important bird habitats and song bird species are being prepared.

The Government are working with conservation and farming organisations to improve the efficiency and targeting of agri-environmental schemes which encourage environmentally sensitive farming.

MAFF has commissioned research into the relationship between farming practices over the last 20 years and populations of farmland birds. MAFF also funds research on establishment and maintenance of hedgerows and has large programmes to support agri-environment schemes and to help promote minimisation of the use of pesticides.

A comprehensive literature review, recently published, considered the possible indirect effect of pesticides on farmland birds. Further research is planned in this area.

An approval system is in place for new pesticides, and existing pesticides are subject to an EU review programme. Older pesticides are therefore reviewed against modern standards.

A pesticide's forum, including agricultural, environmental, food and other groups, has recently published an action plan for the responsible use of pesticides.

A group has been set up to recommend ways of strengthening the Hedgerow Regulations 1997, so that they give better protection for hedgerows. The group is working towards making its recommendations by the end of December this year.

Railtrack (Radio Aerial Masts)

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he had made of the advantages and disadvantages of Railtrack retaining its exemption from planning controls with particular reference to radio aerial masts. [12531]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department is aware of concerns which have been expressed about the use of permitted development rights by statutory undertakers such as Railtrack. Last year we commissioned research to establish the extent to which statutory undertakers rely on permitted development rights and to consider whether any changes are needed. The research project is now complete and we are considering the findings.

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* annual budget of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. [12527]

Angela Eagle: The purpose of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work is to promote improvements in health and safety by collecting and disseminating available technical, scientific and economic information, of relevance to health and safety, throughout the Community and more widely.

The annual budget for the agency for 1997 is 4 million ecu, around £2.9 million.

Work-related Casualties

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to reduce the number of deaths and serious accidents at work; and if he will make a statement on the factors underlying recent increases in work-related casualties. [12479]

Angela Eagle: The Government share concern about the recent increase in workplace accidents. The reasons for the increase are not straightforward and the Health and Safety Commission is conducting further analysis to identify the main causes and influences. The HSC's plan of work for 1997–98 sets out what the Health and Safety Commission and Health and Safety Executive are doing to promote health and safety. But the main responsibility lies with employers and others in industry—they have a legal obligation to manage health and safety properly and they need to do better.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* employees and *(b)* self-employed people (i) were killed or (ii) received major injuries at the workplace in each year since 1993. [12809]

Angela Eagle: The table shows the total number of fatal and major injuries to employees and self employed people reported to enforcing authorities between 1992–93 and 1996–97—years commencing 1 April.

Year	Employees	Self-employed
Fatal injuries		
1992–93	276	63
1993–94	245	51
1994–95	191	81
1995–96	209	49
1996–97[1]	210	77
Major injuries		
1992–93	16,938	1,115
1993–94	16,705	1,274
1994–95	17,041	1,313
1995–96	16,568	1,166
1996–97[1]	[2]27,360	[2]1,311

[1] Provisional. Finalised figures will be available in April 1998.

[2] Definition of major injury extended when The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 came into force on 1 April 1996.

Planning Applications

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many planning applications, by region, have been referred to the Sports Council for England under the terms of the General Development Procedure Order 1995 as amended with effect from 5 August 1996. [12707]

Mr. Raynsford: Between 5 August 1996 and 31 July 1997, 288 applications were referred to the English Sports Council as a statutory consultee. The English Sports Council has provided the following breakdown of this total, based on their regions:

	Number
East	42
East Midlands	42
Greater London	34
North	20
North-West	49
South	25
South-East	11
South-West	34
West Midlands	17
Yorkshire	14

Planning Legislation

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the operation of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 and the Town and Country Planning (Demolition-Description of Buildings) Direction 1995; and if he will make a statement. [12706]

Mr. Raynsford: There are no immediate plans for a review of the operation of either the order or the direction. However, we keep under consideration the need for amendments to these documents in the light of representations received on various issues. Any changes which we proposed introducing to either the permitted development order or the demolition direction would be the subject of consultation.

Energy and Environmental Education

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans his Department has to review its relationship with non-governmental organisations involved in energy and environmental education. [12545]

Angela Eagle: We propose to develop the constructive relationship we have with the many non-governmental organisations involved in energy and environmental education. In particular we look forward to improving co-ordination of initiatives through the panel on sustainable development education which we are setting up.

PVC

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the suitability of PVC for use in construction of publicly funded buildings. [12594]

Mr. Raynsford: One of the potential problems with the use of PVC materials in construction is the possibility of rapid fire spread, and guidance is given on this aspect in Approved Document B (Fire Safety) to the Building Regulations 1991. These regulations make no distinction between publicly funded buildings and any other buildings.

In the case of fire, building regulations are intended to ensure that a reasonable standard of safety is provided. The protection of property, including the building itself, may require additional measures which are the responsibility of either the building owner or insurers to specify on an individual basis and would be dependent on the particular risk associated with the proposed use of the building.

The approved document recognises that the choice of materials for walls and ceilings can significantly affect the spread of a fire and its rate of growth, even though they may not be the materials first ignited. Guidance is therefore given in the approved document on both the location and spacing of thermoplastic and other materials that do not satisfy the performance criteria of British Standard fire tests.

With regard to the general use of PVC in the construction of buildings my Department has consulted with the Department of Health, the Health and Safety Executive and the Building Research Establishment. It was concluded from this consultation that there are no known serious hazards to human health or the environment associated with the use of PVC.

Road Repairs

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Government have to raise the minimum acceptable standards of repair for private contractors digging up roads in the United Kingdom in order to lay pipes and cables. [12573]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The standards to be followed by undertakers when reinstating the highway on completion of their works in the street are set out in a national specification published under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. The undertaker concerned is fully responsible for carrying out the work in compliance with the specification, and failure to comply with the reinstatement standards is a criminal offence which can attract a penalty of up to £1,000.

The reinstatement specification is currently under review by the Highway Authorities and Utilities Committee, which represents the main practitioners. The Government will give very careful consideration to any recommendations which the committee makes.

Planning Appeals (Tennis)

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many planning appeals have been dealt with by his Department during the last 10 years in respect of housing or commercial development on land in use or formerly in use for tennis or in connection with tennis; how many such appeals were allowed; and whether there was a net gain or net loss in the land available for tennis. [12705]

Mr. Raynsford: The provision of information on planning appeals is the responsibility of the Planning Inspectorate. I have asked the Inspectorate's chief executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. Edward Davey, dated 27 October 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about planning appeal decisions during the last 10 years for housing or commercial development on land previously used for, or in connection with, tennis.

The Inspectorate only records details of proposed land uses, not those in, or previously in, existence when an appeal is received. Therefore, the information requested is regrettably not available.

Oil Pollution

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what statutory obligations will be placed on local authorities to achieve proper compliance with the International Maritime Organisation's convention on oil pollution preparedness, response and co-operation, with particular reference to articles 3 and 6; and what resources will be provided to assist them in meeting any such obligations. [12702]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. Regulations to implement the oil pollution preparedness, response and co-operation convention, covering harbour authorities, operators of oil handling facilities and operators of offshore installations, are expected to come into force early next year. They will place no obligations on local authorities. However, the current review of the national contingency plan is considering, amongst other matters, the issue of local authorities' responsibilities for oil pollution, preparedness and response.

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to issue implementation rules in relation to the United Kingdom's treaty obligations under the International Maritime Organisation's convention on oil pollution preparedness, response and co-operation. [12696]

Ms Jackson: Regulations implementing the oil pollution preparedness, response and co-operation—OPRC—convention are expected to come into force early next year. The Coastguard Agency's marine pollution control unit has recently gone out to public consultation on the draft regulations.

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which his Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12561]

Angela Eagle: The following functions and systems have been purchased.

	System purchased	*Function*	*Name of sub-contractors*	*Co-operative arrangements*	*Cost in last financial year (£000)*
DETR	Finest	Accounting, purchasing and invoicing	Software AG WS Atkins Information Technology	None	n/a
Environment Agency	McKeown	Accounting, purchasing and invoicing	None	None	n/a
Health and Safety Executive	McKeown	Accounting, purchasing and invoicing	None	None	576
Rural Development	CFACS	Purchasing and invoicing	Cedardata	None	52
Planning Inspectorate	Sunsystem	Accounting, purchasing and invoicing	None	None	16
Highways Agency	SunBusiness invoice register	Invoicing	Thompson Systems	None	11

Full costs for all systems cannot be obtained due to disproportionate costs.

Council Tax Arrears

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will bring in legislation to exclude imprisonment as an option at magistrates' disposal when they consider cases of poll tax and council tax arrears. [12719]

Mr. Raynsford: We have no plans to do so. Committal remains an important tool for local authorities in their efforts to recover unpaid council tax and community charge, but it is used as a last resort and a debtor can be imprisoned only where a magistrate is satisfied that failure to pay has been due to wilful refusal or culpable neglect. However, the Department has recently issued a consultation paper on the enforcement of council tax debts which, amongst other things, invites views on giving magistrates powers to impose a community service order as an additional enforcement option.

Sports Clubs

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the maximum length of tenancy a court may grant to a sports club under the terms of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954. [12704]

Mr. Raynsford: The Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 enables courts to order the renewal of business tenancies—including sports club tenancies—for a maximum of 14 years. The Law Commission has recommended increasing this to 15 years. Other than considering this recommendation, we have no plans to review the maximum length of tenancy courts may grant when considering applications for renewals of leases under the 1954 Act.

I know there is concern over the circumstances in which landlords may be able to frustrate applications by sports clubs for the renewal of their leases. We are considering this point.

Energy Education

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to improve co-ordination between different Government Departments and their agencies when preparing educational material on energy; and if he will make a statement. [12547]

Angela Eagle: A co-ordinating group of Government Departments with an interest in sustainable development education in England, including energy education, has been established to ensure that Government action is well co-ordinated.

Substances Regulation Working Group

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the European working group on substances regulation to report; what recommendations were submitted from the United Kingdom through *(a)* the Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* the Department of the Environment; and if he will make a statement. [12806]

Angela Eagle: This question has been taken to relate to the existing substances regulation. The Committee, composed of representatives of the member States and chaired by the European Commission, awaits the outcome of detailed technical discussions underway in working groups, which will form the basis of any recommendation for measures to be taken in relation to substances covered by the Regulation. The UK has the lead on 13 of the 78 substances on the first and second priority lists. The assessments on 30 substances are currently under discussion; Nine submitted by the UK. Some are at a more advanced stage than others but the nine UK assessments should complete the technical review stage over the next six months before progressing to Committee stage.

The Health and Safety Executive, the Environment Agency, and environment directorates within the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions co-operate closely, submitting joint assessments to working groups.

Trichloroethylene

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to revise occupational exposure limits for trichloroethylene; and if he will make a statement. [12805]

Angela Eagle: The Health and Safety Commission has no immediate plans to revise the current maximum exposure limits for trichloroethylene. The Health and Safety Executive and the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions have prepared a comprehensive risk assessment document on trichloroethylene under the EU existing substances regulation. This document is still being discussed by member states. Decisions on any further risk reduction measures will be made after these discussions are concluded.

Disabled People (Parking Permits)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the arrangements for issuing orange badge parking permits to disabled people. [12759]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have no plans at present to change either the criteria for issuing orange badges or the parking concessions granted to badge holders under the scheme. However, the Government have agreed, subject to parliamentary scrutiny, to a European Commission proposal for a recommendation to member states for a standard design for national parking badges to facilitate their mutual recognition. If finally agreed, the new design would be introduced in the United Kingdom over the normal three-year replacement cycle from 1 January 2000.

Housing Association Rents

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the total gross revenue from housing association rents in the last year for which figures are available; and what proportion of this is met by housing benefit. [12834]

Mr. Raynsford: The latest information available on gross revenue from housing association rents is for 1995–96 and covers 95 per cent. of the housing stock owned by associations. In England during that year the gross revenue produced by this stock was around £2,048 million. The amount of housing benefit paid to the tenants of all housing association stock in England during 1995–96 is estimated to have been around £1,395 million.

Weald and Downland Roads Project

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to what extent the impact on employment *(a)* in Hastings and *(b)* Tunbridge Wells was taken into account in the decision not to allow the Weald and Downland design, build, finance and operate to proceed. [12783]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The impact on employment of the DBFO project was one of the many issues assessed under the five criteria—accessibility, safety, economy, the environment and integration—when the decision not to proceed with the DBFO project as a whole was taken.

London Underground

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on London Underground's Project Prestige. [12880]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Prestige project, which will provide London Transport with a new ticketing system for both London Underground and London Transport Buses, is currently under negotiation between London Transport and Transys, a private sector consortium. It is hoped that negotiations will be completed in the near future.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to make an announcement on the future funding arrangements for London Underground. [12980]

Ms Jackson: The Government are urgently considering a range of options for the future funding of London Underground, but it is too early to say when an announcement will be made.

Transport Select Committee Reports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the former Government's responses to the Transport Select Committee's reports on *(a)* United Kingdom airport capacity—HC644 of Session 1995–96—and *(b)* the adequacy and enforcement of regulations governing heavy goods vehicles, buses and coaches—HC54 of Session 1996–97. [12971]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government will be taking fully into account the helpful reports of the Select Committee in developing policy on *(a)* aviation related matters within the proposed "Integrated Transport" White Paper and *(b)* enforcement of heavy goods vehicles, buses and coaches.

Cycling

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the actions taken by his Department since 1 May to increase provision for cyclists and increase cycle use. [12991]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have given our endorsement to the national cycling strategy which aims to quadruple cycle use by 2012. The NCS has a common ownership, having been established by consensus involving a wide range of bodies. I have chaired two meetings of the national Cycling Forum to discuss a range of issues involved in taking the strategy forward. We are now working actively with others to implement it. The Department also provides technical advice to local authority practitioners who play a significant role in developing initiatives at a local level. In July we hosted a regional seminar aimed at traffic engineers and planners to promote the NCS. And in August we published two traffic advisory leaflets outlining results of research on cycle-related issues.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to develop a strategic cycle lane network throughout London; and if he will make a statement. [12897]

Ms Jackson: The Government are supporting the London Cycle Network which is a 2,500 km strategic network of routes being developed by 33 London boroughs. Approximately 30 per cent. of the network exists already. Whilst the boroughs total estimated cost is £67 million, some £45 million is sought through the transport policies and programme funding, with additional sources of funding coming from the Traffic Director for London—on red routes—the Highways Agency—on trunk roads—and the Millennium Commission as well as the boroughs themselves. Now in its third year of implementation the LCN has so far received TPP allocation of £10.55 million.

Motor Vehicle Insurance

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the advantages of introducing a requirement for displaying insurance certificates in motor vehicles. [12801]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Such a requirement could give some assurance that an insurance policy for the vehicle was in force; accompanying provisions to prevent the display of certificates for policies which had been cancelled would also be needed. Display of a certificate would however provide no assurance that the driver was covered by an insurance policy or was complying with policy conditions. The value of a requirement to display would therefore be less in this country than in those countries which have vehicle-related insurance systems, under which cover is taken out for a particular vehicle regardless of who drives it. Although the Government have not discarded the possibility of a requirement to display evidence of insurance, it appears at present that other measures, such as a computerised insurance database, would offer a better approach to the problem of dealing with the irresponsible minority of drivers who fail to take out insurance. The nation-wide introduction of wheelclamping for vehicles for which vehicle excise duty has been evaded will also provide a significant knock on benefit for enforcement of the compulsory insurance requirements.

Integrated Transport Strategy Seminars

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons hon. Members have not been invited to attend seminars on the development of an integrated transport strategy being organised by the Government office for the south-east; and if he will make a statement. [12875]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government office has held a number of seminars with local authorities, transport operators, users and environmental groups and others to discuss transport policy. To be effective, numbers attending had to be limited and so it was not possible to invite the region's 83 Members of Parliament. The Department did, however, send all hon. Members copies of the consultation documents on the role of the trunk road network in England and on developing an integrated transport policy: and would welcome any contributions which Members of Parliament might wish to make.

Air Misses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will meet representatives from the Civil Aviation Authority to discuss the occurrence of near misses between aeroplanes in flight; and if he will make a statement. [12898]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Both Ministers and senior officials have discussed these issues with representatives of the Civil Aviation Authority and National Air Traffic Services Limited, and will continue to do so.

Regional Airports

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those regional airports which have lost their direct air links to Heathrow or Gatwick airports over the last five years. [12992]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Regional airports in the UK that have lost their direct air services to Heathrow and Gatwick since 1992, are as follows:

To Heathrow	*To Gatwick*
Birmingham	Birmingham
East Midlands	Cardiff
(Inverness)[1]	East Midlands
Liverpool	Liverpool
Newquay[2]	
Plymouth[2]	

[1] British Airways have announced that they intend to transfer the Inverness service from Heathrow to Gatwick with effect from 17 November 1997.

[2] Newquay and Plymouth are now served from Gatwick.

Integrated Transport Policy

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those organisations that have responded to date to the consultation exercise on an integrated transport policy. [12973]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Some 20,000 copies of the consultation document on developing an integrated transport policy have been sent out to members of the public and organisations. So far, around 4,000 responses have been received and officials are now entering details of these on to a database so that they can be properly analysed. The great bulk of responses received to date are from individuals and it is likely that most organisations such as business and local authorities will contribute nearer the closing date of 14 November.

A full report on the consultation exercise will be published with the White Paper.

Drivers (Eyesight)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent research his Department has evaluated into the awareness of drivers of poor eyesight. [12863]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In 1995 the Department commissioned Professor W.N. Charman of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology to undertake a thorough review of the research on driver vision standards.

The Department published his report earlier this year and it is available as "Road Safety Research Report No. 2 vision and Driving—A Literature Review and Commentary". I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his Department's estimate of the number of drivers in the United Kingdom who are unaware that their eyesight is below the safe minimum standard. [12793]

Ms Jackson: A survey carried out by the Transport Research Laboratory 1992 found that about 2.5 per cent. of drivers did not meet the statutory requirement of being able to read a number plate in good light from a distance of 20.5m with glasses or contact lenses if worn. A subsequent survey commissioned by others has suggested a higher figure. It would clearly be difficult to establish how many of the drivers concerned were unaware that their eyesight had fallen below the required standard. The Department strongly advises drivers to check themselves against the number plate standard regularly. Where eyesight is below the required standard, the normal remedy will be to obtain new glasses or contact lenses. Drivers who cannot meet the standard must notify the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency immediately and stop driving; otherwise they are committing a criminal offence. Drivers who require glasses or contact lenses in order to meet the standard must wear them whenever driving.

Rented Housing

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the gross cost to the public sector if all local authority rents were to be cut by 10 per cent.; and what would be the cost net of savings in housing benefits. [12836]

Mr. Raynsford: A 10 per cent. reduction in guideline rents in 1998–99 for housing revenue account local authorities in England would have the following estimated effects:

Present value (discounting to 1996–97) of effects from 1998–99 to 2027–28
1996–97 prices discounting to 1996–97

Effect	*Present value (£ million)*
Loss of gross rental income	5,819.6
Savings in rent rebates	4,378.2
Saving in public expenditure linked to the RPI	1,341.4
Net public expenditure cost	100.0

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what increase in subsidy to housing associations would be necessary to produce a reduction of 10 per cent. in the average level of housing association rents. [12835]

Mr. Raynsford: Rent subsidies are not paid to housing associations. Social housing grant is a capital grant paid on new housing association development, but any changes in the grant rate for new development would not directly affect rents on existing housing association stock.

Minerals (Carriage by Rail)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will amend the regulations for the carriage of minerals by rail in order to secure the same control on dust emission as is required by road transport. [12760]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Local authorities already have adequate powers to control dust emissions from minerals carried by rail. They can impose planning conditions under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and take enforcement action under the statutory nuisance provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Green Belt

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), of 21 July, *Official Report*, column *430*, on how many occasions an inquiry into a strategic or unitary development plan has proposed large-scale releases of green belt land for housing; and if he will list those which he or his predecessors have called in or have requested modifications. [12974]

Mr. Raynsford: This information is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Local Government Review

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the direct cost to public funds of the local government review process in England between April 1992 and March 1997. [12941]

Mr. Raynsford: The cost of the Local Government Commission, which undertook the structural review of local government during those years, is as follows:

Year	*Total expenditure £ million*
1992–93	2.056
1993–94	5.146
1994–95	7.913
1995–96	4.047
1996–97	2.099

Working Time Directive

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps are being taken to extend the scope of the European Union working time directive to cover transport workers. [12879]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The European Commission published a White Paper in July on proposals for extending the provisions of the working time directive to the excluded sectors. We are currently considering this and will reply to the Commission in due course.

Congestion Charging

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the local authorities currently piloting congestion charging schemes; and what plans he has for extending such trials. [12990]

Ms Glenda Jackson: An experiment funded by my Department is under way in Leicester. This is a research project using volunteers. Compulsory charging could not be undertaken, even on a trial basis, without new primary legislation. Whether to introduce such legislation, and whether to facilitate further experimental schemes, are issues that the Government are considering as part of the preparation for the integrated transport policy White Paper.

Gas Power

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the Rio II treaty on United Kingdom policy towards gas power. [11102]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply

The United Nations General Assembly special session on 23 to 27 June 1997 did not result in any treaty commitments. However, in considering applications for gas-fired and other forms of power stations, we will ensure consistency with the wider objectives of secure, diverse and sustainable supplies of energy at competitive prices and meeting environmental targets.

Multilateral Agreement on Investment

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what analysis the Government have carried out on the environmental labour and development impact of the multilateral agreement on investment. [11864]

Mrs. Roche: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are committed to safeguarding the international environment, to eliminating abusive labour practices and to promoting sustainable development in both developing and industrialised countries. We would not want to see an agreement which undermined our environmental, labour or development policies.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations she has received from asylum seekers relating to their living standards. [11656]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We have received approximately 40 letters about the benefit position of asylum seekers from hon. Members, members of the public and asylum seekers' representatives. We have also received a copy of the report, "Past Misery, Present Muddle" from the charity the Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture.

As part of the Home Office's comprehensive spending review, an interdepartmental review is currently considering all aspects of arrangements for asylum seekers, including the provision of accommodation and support.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps she will take to co-ordinate activities between the Child Support Agency and the Benefits Agency to combat benefit fraud; and if she will assess the advantages of measures to deal with deliberate evasion of child maintenance by absent parents. [12489]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Children are entitled to the support of both parents wherever they live. It is not acceptable that parents should seek to avoid their responsibilities and one of our key aims for the Child Support Agency is to ensure that more absent parents pay the maintenance they owe.

The Child Support Agency and the Benefits Agency have established liaison arrangements to ensure that the two agencies work effectively together in providing an improved level of service for their joint customers. These include the shared use of common information or allegations made by the public to detect and prevent benefit fraud and the stationing of fraud liaison officers at Child Support Agency centres. Questions about child support are now included in the income support claim form to allow the maintenance process to begin as soon as benefit is claimed. And, from April 1998, parents with care will be helped to complete a maintenance application form when visited by Benefits Agency staff at the start of their income support claim.

Earnings Disregards

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the current value of earnings disregards under income support, housing benefit and jobseeker's allowance if they had been increased *(a)* in line with prices and *(b)* in line with earnings since April 1988. [12284]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is in the table.

Benefit	*Rate when introduced* £	*Date of introduction*	*Current rate* £	*Value if increased in line with prices since date introduced* £	*Value if increased in line with earnings since date introduced* £
Income support	5	April 1988	5	7.35	8.50
	10	October 1996	10	10.25	10.40
	15	April 1988	15	22.05	25.60
Jobseeker's allowance	5	October 1996	5	5.15	5.20
	10	October 1996	10	10.25	10.40
	15	October 1996	15	15.40	15.65
Housing Benefit	5	April 1988	5	7.35	8.50
	10	April 1988	10	14.75	17.10
	15	April 1988	15	22.05	25.60
	15	April 1988	25	22.05	25.60
Housing benefit child care disregard	40	October 1994	60	43.05	44.75

1. The figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 p at each uprating date.
2. The retail prices index (all items) less rent, local taxes and mortgage interest payments as published by the Office of National Statistics, has been used in this table.
3. Jobseeker's allowance replaced income support for the unemployed in October 1996.
4. The £15 disregard for housing benefit was increased for lone parents to £25 in October 1990.
5. The £40 child care disregard on housing benefit was increased to £60 in April, 1996.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will investigate the level of accuracy of the CSA assessments. [12487]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are looking closely at all aspects of the Child Support Agency to ensure that it provides an efficient and effective service.

The receipt of regular maintenance is a key part of the Government's strategy for helping lone mothers into work. All the indicators currently in place show a continuing improvement in the accuracy of assessments. We expect this trend to be maintained both as the result of continued efforts by the agency's staff and as the provisions contained in the Social Security Bill are implemented in due course. These provisions will improve and simplify the decision-making process.

Social Protection

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will place in the Library a copy of the full correspondence between her Department and European Commissioner Flynn on the European Union discussion document on social protection. [12509]

Mr. Keith Bradley: In March the European Commission published, "Communication on Modernising and Improving Social Protection in the European Union", with the invitation that recipients submit observations on the range of issues covered.

A copy of the letter sent to Commissioner Flynn on 17 July has been placed in the Library. This response welcomed a well structured discussion in Europe of Key issues in social protection, but ruled out direct involvement of the EU in decisions which remain the responsibility of member states. It also gave an outline of the Government's priorities and thinking on modernising social protection.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to review the all work test for incapacity benefit. [12488]

Mr. Denham: We are reviewing all aspects of the social security system. We will assess whether sickness and disability benefits are consistent with our overall aims to encourage work, savings and honesty. A key aim is to help people focus on their capacity for work rather than their disability and provide a climate which will help them achieve independence and play a fuller part in society.

As part of this we will be looking at a number of eligibility issues including those surrounding the all work test, and will be seeking to ensure the test provides a fair assessment of incapacity for benefit purposes.

Benefit Overpayment

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what procedures apply in respect of individuals seeking the return of money they have repaid for benefit overpayment subsequently determined by an adjudicating officer as not requiring repayment. [12490]

Mr. Keith Bradley: All overpayments of benefit are looked at individually and their recoverability decided upon on the basis of the facts and circumstances of the case as known at the time of the decision. However, where the decision to recover an overpayment is subsequently reversed, this will affect only the balance of the overpayment still outstanding.

Correspondence Unit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many letters have been passed on to her Department's correspondence unit in each month since May 1997; and if she will make a statement; [12936]

(2) how many and what percentage of correspondence answered by her Department's correspondence unit receives a full response in *(a)* a week or less, *(b)* one to two weeks, *(c)* two to three weeks, *(d)* three to four weeks, *(e)* between one and two months, *(f)* over two months and *(g)* over six months; and if she will make a statement; [12934]

(3) how many and what percentage of correspondence answered by her Department's correspondence unit receives a holding reply prior to a full response; [12933]

(4) how many people are employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in her Department's correspondence unit; [12937]

(5) under what circumstances correspondence sent to her Department is passed on to the correspondence unit; and if she will make a statement. [12935]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

During the period May to September 1997, departmental Ministers received around 25,000 letters from hon. Members, members of the public and others. This compares with around 15,000 letters received by Ministers during the same period last year. The figures for each month are as follows:

Total letters received

	1996	*1997*
May	3,244	4,124
June	3,003	5,458
July	4,043	6,948
August	2,149	4,374
September	2,897	4,136
Total	15,336	25,040

A correspondence section attached to Ministers' offices, which has 13 full-time staff, receives all correspondence and seeks advice from officials, including those in the policy correspondence unit. Other units and officials elsewhere in the Department also deal with correspondence.

Our target is to reply to all letters within 20 working days. Ministers reply personally to about 30 per cent. of letters. The target response time has been achieved for 42 per cent. of letters in the last five months. Detailed figures are shown in the table:

Ministerial replies issued

			Number of days
	Up to 20	*21–40*	*40+*
May			
Number	68	0	0
Per cent.	100	0	0
June			
Number	278	58	0
Per cent.	83	17	0
July			
Number	556	525	76
Per cent.	48	46	6
August			
Number	485	569	214
Per cent.	38	45	17
September			
Number	349	629	368
Per cent.	26	47	27

1. Figures for turn around times of correspondence answered by officials are not available.
2. Figures for the number of holding replies are not kept but all letters are acknowledged shortly after receipt.

We remain committed to answering all correspondence within 20 working days and are taking active measures to reduce turnaround times.

Lone Parents

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list for the most recent available period, *(a)* the number of claimants of one-parent benefit in the United Kingdom and each region and nation, *(b)* the estimated number of claimants of one-parent benefit for the same areas who are (i) working and (ii) working and receiving family credit, *(c)* the number of claimants of one-parent benefit who are also receiving lone-parent premium for the same areas and *(d)* the number of new claimants in each area over the most recent 12 month period. [12979]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table:

Country/region[1]	*One parent benefit (OPB) recipients*[2]	*Lone parents receiving family credit*[3]	*OPB recipients receiving lone parent premium in income support/jobseeker's allowance*[4, 5]	*OPB recipients receiving lone parent premium in housing benefit*[5, 6]	*OPB recipients receiving lone parent premium in council tax benefit*[5, 6]	*New claims to OPB*[7]
Great Britain	1,027,000	326,000	388,000	109,000	89,000	165,000
England	874,000	263,000	335,000	91,000	75,000	n/a
South-east (including London)	n/a	n/a	140,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
North	n/a	n/a	23,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
Yorkshire and Humberside	n/a	n/a	28,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
East Midlands	n/a	n/a	21,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
East Anglia	n/a	n/a	10,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
South-west	n/a	n/a	23,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
West Midlands	n/a	n/a	32,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
North-west	n/a	n/a	58,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
Scotland	104,000	45,000	35,000	14,000	11,000	n/a
Wales	50,000	19,000	18,000	4,000	3,000	n/a

[1] Standard statistical English regions.

[2] As at 31 December 1996. Based on 1 per cent. sample of child benefit centre records.

[3] As at 31 December 1996. Represents the maximum number of such lone parents that could potentially be in receipt of OPB. Based on 5 per cent. sample of family credit records.

[4] Income support as at November 1996, based on Quarterly Statistical Enquiry. Excludes 6,000 jobseeker's allowance (Income based) cases which cannot be split by country/region.

[5] Excludes OPB recipients receiving income support/jobseeker's allowance/housing benefit/council tax benefit but not receiving a lone parent premium because they receive a higher value premium e.g., disabled child premium.

[6] Housing benefit/council tax benefit recipients not also in receipt of IS/JSA, as at May 1996. Based on HB/CTB Annual Statistical Enquiry. There is an overlap as most people receive both HB and CTB.

[7] For year ending 31 December 1996. Based on 1 per cent. sample of child benefit centre records.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to her answer of 30 July, *Official Report*, column *364*, what estimate she has made of the number of lone parents in receipt of income support in each of the next three financial years. [12822]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The latest estimates of the number of lone parents in receipt of income support in each of the next three financial years are shown in the table. Unfortunately revised estimates will not actually be available until publication of the 1998 social security departmental report next Spring.

Lone parents in receipt of income support

	Thousands
1997–98	1,054
1998–99	1,044
1999–00	1,054

1. Figures are consistent with those given in tables 6 and 7 in the 1997 Social Security Departmental Report and are rounded to the nearest thousand.

2. Figures are based on a 5 per cent sample and as such are subject to a degree of sampling variation.

Backdating

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for benefit made in the last year were eventually backdated *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* at least one month but less than three months, *(c)* at least three months but less than 12 months and *(d)* at least 12 months for each of the major social security benefits. [12818]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

Number of claimants affected as a result of changes to the backdating rules from April 1997 and June/October 1998

Full-year estimates

	Claims	
	Over 1 month, up to 3 months	*Over 3 months*
Retirement pension	Negligible	40,000
Incapacity benefit	5,000	10,000
Invalid care allowance	20,000	30,000
Industrial injuries disablement benefit	2,500	2,500
Contributory jobseeker's allowance	[1]—	Negligible
Income support/income based jobseeker's allowance	105,000	30,000
Child benefit/one parent benefit	[2]—	65,000
Housing benefit (HB)/council tax benefit (CTB)	HB 5,000/ CTB15,000	HB 45,000/ CTB 100,000
Other benefits	Negligible	Negligible
Total	155,000	325,000

[1] Information not available.

[2] Information not readily available.

Information is based on a small ad-hoc survey of benefit claims undertaken during early 1996.

Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the main reasons why individuals claim benefits late; and if she will make a statement. [12819]

Mr. Bradley: An ad hoc survey of a small number of Benefits Agency local offices was undertaken in early 1996 to provide information on the extent of backdating and, in those benefits where it was possible to identify, the reason for backdating.

This information was used in deciding on the range of exceptions provided in the current regulations.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the time-table for the implementation of limits on the backdating of benefits to one month. [12953]

Mr. Bradley: We intend to implement the new backdating rules in June 1998 for all benefits except housing benefit and council tax benefit which will be implemented in October 1998.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Custodial Sentences

11. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the deterrent effects of custodial sentences. [11667]

Ms Quin: The Home Office research and statistics directorate has recently commissioned a literature review of the deterrent effect of the various sentencing options which will be completed early next year.

Crime (Rural Areas)

17. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives he intends to take to reduce crime in rural areas. [11673]

Mr. Michael: Our comprehensive strategy against crime includes a new statutory duty on local authorities and the police to develop local partnerships to prevent crime and promote community safety. This will benefit all parts of the country: rural as well as urban and inner city by targeting the specific problems and needs of each area.

Criminal Justice

22. **Ms Blears:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce delays in the criminal justice system. [11678]

25. **Mr. Cranston:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to tackle delays in the criminal justice system. [11681]

Mr. Michael: The Government are committed to tackling delay throughout the criminal justice system and have pledged to halve the time taken to deal with persistent young offenders. We have accepted proposals from the review of delay in the criminal justice system which are designed to enable straightforward guilty plea cases to be dealt within days of charge, improve case management in magistrates courts and start indictable-only cases in the Crown Court. The Crime and Disorder Bill will contain the necessary measures and, to underpin them, will make provision for statutory time limits which will be tougher for young offenders than for adults, and tougher still for persistent young offenders. Our proposals for legislation to speed up youth justice were published in a consultation paper, "Tackling Delay in the Youth Justice System", on 15 October when we also published comprehensive guidance for youth justice agencies on tackling delays within the existing statutory framework.

European Convention on Human Rights

23. **Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the incorporation of the European convention on human rights. [11679]

Mr. Straw: We have made rapid progress on this. We introduced the Human Rights Bill in another place last Thursday and we published the White Paper "Rights Brought Home" last Friday.

Private Security Industry

24. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce the statutory regulation of the private security industry. [11680]

Mr. Michael: We intend to introduce statutory regulation of the private security industry as soon as possible. As we warned in opposition, we will not be able to bring forward legislation in our first year of office, but as is shown by our consultation exercise, we are already working with the industry and others to achieve a consensus on the best way to provide a comprehensive, effective and streamlined system of regulations.

38. **Mr. Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce the statutory regulation of the private security industry. [11694]

Mr. Michael: We intend to introduce statutory regulation of the private security industry as soon as possible. We will not be able to bring forward legislation in our first year of office, as we warned before the election, but we have recently completed a consultation exercise with the industry and others on the best way to provide a comprehensive, effective and streamlined system. We want to look beyond the narrow proposals put forward by the previous Government which focused only on criminal record checks for the contract guarding sector of the industry. In opposition we welcomed the recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee on regulation. However, the Committee did not offer a detailed blueprint and in the light of the responses received to the consultation exercise we will consider the industry as a whole to decide what action is needed.

Rural Police Officers

26. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to recruit more police officers in rural areas. [11682]

32. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that police authorities have the resources to enable more police officers to be recruited in rural areas. [11688]

Mr. Michael: I recognise that people in rural communities have different policing needs from those who live in urban areas, but the Government have no direct control over police numbers. Under legislation passed by the previous Government, it is for individual chief constables to determine the number of police officers in each force having regard to the resources available to them.

We are working with the police to reduce administrative burdens and to increase civilianisation which will allow chief constables to put more officers on the beat. We also intend to introduce legislation which will place a statutory duty on all local authorities and the police jointly to develop partnerships to reduce crime. Local communities will be able to identify their needs and the strategies to tackle them.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to recruit more police officers in rural areas. [11658]

Mr. Michael: People in rural communities have different policing needs from those in urban areas, but the Government have no direct control over police numbers in either. Under legislation passed by the previous Government, it is for individual chief constables to determine the number of police officers in each force, having regard to the resources available to them and their deployment.

We are working with the police to reduce administrative burdens and to enable chief constables to put more officers out into the community. We also intend to introduce legislation which will place a statutory duty on all local authorities and the police jointly to develop partnerships to cut crime in rural and urban areas alike.

Crime Prevention (Local Authorities)

27. **Mr. Rammell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to give local authorities statutory powers for crime prevention. [11683]

34. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he will introduce to increase the involvement of local authorities in combating crime. [11690]

Mr. Michael: Details of our proposals were set out in the consultation document, "Getting to Grips with Crime—a new framework for Local Action", which we published on 17 September. It is our intention to require local authorities and the police service together to conduct an audit of local crime and disorder problems, to draw up a strategy for tackling them and to publish targets for delivering the strategy. This process must be conducted on the basis of full consultation with local people and a wide range of other key partners.

Crime (EU Discussions)

28. **Mrs. Fiona Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met his European counterparts to discuss crime levels. [11684]

Ms Quin: My right hon. Friend and I met all the Justice and Home Affairs Ministers of the European Union on 9 and 10 October and, most recently, on 20 and 21 October my right hon. Friend met the French Justice and Interior Ministers. On both occasions, a useful discussion on a number of crime-related issues took place.

Young Offenders

29. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to encourage the voluntary sector to participate in offering opportunities for young people convicted of crimes. [11685]

Mr. Michael: Through the new deal for unemployed 18–24-year-olds, we are encouraging voluntary organisations to come forward with a wide range of programmes and opportunities which will address the employability needs of young unemployed people, including those convicted of crimes, as well as doing useful work for the community.

In addition, the voluntary sector, in partnership with probation and prison services and other statutory agencies, delivers a range of programmes for young offenders, including drug and alcohol counselling, advice on employment, training and education opportunities, accommodation provision and developmental programmes.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to introduce more severe penalties for young offenders; and if he will make a statement. [11676]

Mr. Michael: Our proposals for reform of the youth justice system have been set out in three consultation papers published in the last five weeks. Our aim is a faster, more efficient youth justice system with a clear focus on preventing re-offending. A new final warning scheme will end multiple cautions and ensure that firm action is taken quickly when young people offend. A new court order will require young people to make reparation to victims. We will strengthen community penalties and ensure effective custodial sentences for the most serious and persistent young offenders.

Anti-social Behaviour

30. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the relationship between anti-social behaviour and crime. [11686]

Mr. Michael: The British crime survey has demonstrated a link between disorder or low-level misbehaviour and the levels of more serious crime in an area.

Anti-social behaviour also causes alarm and distress and heightens the fear of crime. Tackling this sort of conduct and preventing its escalating into more serious criminal behaviour is a central element in our policy towards making our communities safer. Proposals in the Crime and Disorder Bill which we will introduce later this year will address this directly and we are working with the police on ways to identify and target anti-social behaviour.

Prisons (Capacity)

31. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the number of places in prisons. [11687]

Ms Quin: To help with the current population pressures, the Prison Service was allocated a further £43 million in July for this year and next. In total, these resources will create 290 new places on top of those to be provided by the existing building programme and will provide additional staffing and fund regime activities to support the placing of a further 1,830 prisoners in existing accommodation.

The existing building programme will provide 8,600 additional places over this year and the next two years through a combination of expanding existing prisons and building new prisons.

Closed Circuit Television

33. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy with regard to CCTV schemes. [11689]

37. **Mr. St. Aubyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the role of CCTV in combating crime. [11693]

Mr. Michael: I strongly support closed circuit television schemes, which can be effective in preventing crime and the fear of crime. They can make a contribution to community safety in general, especially as part of a wider crime prevention strategy. I am currently considering, linked to our review of existing expenditure programmes, how to encourage the appropriate use of CCTV in the fight against crime.

Corruption

35. **Mr. Ivan Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government plans to create a single offence of corruption. [11691]

Mr. Michael: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary published on 9 June a statement on reform of the corruption statutes for consultation. A copy is available in the Library. The Law Commission will also be producing proposals for reform of the law in this area.

My right hon. Friend will consider carefully the results of these exercises, together with any further recommendations the Nolan committee may make in relation to the criminal law.

My right hon. Friend expects to make a further statement on the reform of the law in this area early next year.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what legislation is currently being discussed at the European Union level for the standardisation of member states' legislation pertaining to the combating of corruption by officials; and if he will make a statement. [12315]

Mr. Michael: In September 1996, European Union member states adopted a protocol to the 1995 Convention on the Protection of the Financial Interests of the European Communities. The protocol requires all member states to establish a certain minimum level of protection against damage to the Communities' budget by reason of corruption which makes similar provision in the case of corruption of or by national or Community officials. In May 1997, the member states adopted a separate convention on corruption of or by national or Community officials which is not linked to damage to the Communities' budget. These instruments do not cover the corruption of officials from third countries, but member states have, in recent weeks, adopted two common positions under title VI of the treaty on European Union supporting on-going negotiations in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Council of Europe on conventions which address this aspect.

The Government strongly support measures to penalise corruption, whether by or of national or Community officials or in the private sector. To that end, they intend to take forward next year, during the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Union, recommendation 6 of the European Union action plan on combating organised crime, which was endorsed by the Amsterdam European Council. This requires the development of a comprehensive Union policy on corruption covering first and third pillar measures and applying to public sector officials and to the private sector.

Prisoners

36. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of prisoners on 1 May; and if he will make a statement. [11692]

Ms Quin: The prison population on 1 May was 60,088.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the amount of time prisoners spend *(a)* in working and *(b)* on education schemes. [11849]

Ms Quin: The Government recognise the difficulties faced by the Prison Service in dealing with the exceptional rise in the prison population, but remain committed to ensuring that prisoners are provided with constructive regimes.

We expect the Prison Service to seek to expand work opportunities for prisoners by developing its ability to attract work from the private sector and by improving the organisation of prison regimes so as to maximise the time that prisoners can spend in purposeful activity, including work.

Invitations to tender for new contracts to deliver education in prisons, to be issued shortly, will aim for contracts which, in delivering the prison core curriculum, maximise efficient use of resources and offer a dynamic ability to meet the needs of particular prison establishments.

Provision for regime facilities is included in the extra £43 million over this year and next which has been made available to the Prison Service to help cope with overcrowding pressures.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to accommodate the rise in the number of prisoners; and what is his policy on early release. [12264]

Ms Quin: To help with the increasing population pressures, the Prison Service was allocated a further £43 million in July for this year and the next. In total, these additional resources will create 290 new places on top of those to be provided by the existing building programme. These funds will also provide additional staffing and funding for regime activities to support the placing of a further 1,830 prisoners in existing accommodation.

The existing building programme will provide 8,600 additional places over this year and the next two years, through a combination of expanding existing prisons and building new prisons.

Early release arrangements are set out in part II of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. The Government have no plans to review these. As regards executive release, the Government have no plans to use these powers. Executive release from prison is designed to be used as a last resort.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards prisoners having television in their cells; and if he will make a statement. [12265]

Ms Quin: The Government are reconsidering policy in this area, including examining the case for in-cell television as an earned privilege, but we have not yet taken final decisions. Meanwhile, no action has been taken either to extend the privilege of in-cell television or to withdraw sets from those establishments that currently allow them.

The all-party Home Affairs Committee, then with a Conservative majority, recommended in March 1997 a rethink of policy and stressed the potential of television as a means of contributing to good order in a prison.

The Learmont report in 1995 recommended that in-cell television should be made widely available and pointed to its potential benefits as an information as well as a recreational medium.

UK Border Controls

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on the retention of United Kingdom border controls with the rest of the European Union. [11848]

Ms Quin: We intend to retain the United Kingdom's system of frontier controls. In the treaty of Amsterdam we have obtained legal confirmation of the right to maintain controls at our frontiers with other member states of the European Union.

Gambling (Arbitration Body)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the advantages of establishing an independent body to arbitrate in disputes between people making wagers and bookmakers. [12516]

Mr. George Howarth: The Horserace Betting Levy Board has recently considered this and other related matters. It concluded that the current arrangements for settling disputes—the Tattersalls' committee and the green seal service—were effective in most cases.

I will be discussing the issues with the levy board shortly.

Greyhound Racing

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* proportion and *(b)* number of greyhound races shown in betting shops are from racecourses owned by the major off-course betting companies. [12304]

Mr. George Howarth: Of the 9,646 greyhound races shown in betting shops in the year to 31 October 1997, 4,108—42.6 per cent.—will be from tracks owned by major off-course betting companies.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated shortfall in revenue to the British greyhound racing fund since 1992 resulting from certain bookmaking companies failing to contribute to the fund. [12311]

Mr. Howarth: The British Greyhound Racing Board estimates that the fund should have received £22 million since 1992 but has actually received £13.4 million, leaving a shortfall of £8.6 million in contributions.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bookmaking companies currently pay the agreed 0.4 per cent. contributions to the British greyhound racing fund. [12306]

Mr. Howarth: We understand that up to September 1996 the fund had received contributions from 97 bookmakers.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the *(a)* proportion and *(b)* number of greyhound races shown in betting shops. [12313]

Mr. Howarth: In the year 1 November 1996 to 31 October 1997, 9,646 afternoon greyhound races will be transmitted from greyhound tracks into betting shops.

In 1996, 74,343 races were staged by National Greyhound Racing Club member tracks; 13 per cent. of these were shown in betting shops.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the contracting process between the bookmakers' afternoon greyhound services and the greyhound racecourses. [12303]

Mr. Howarth: We have no plans to review the contracting process between Bookmakers' Afternoon Greyhound Services and greyhound tracks. This is a commercial matter between them.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many National Greyhound Racing Club greyhound racecourses are currently in operation; and how many are owned by major off-course betting companies. [12312]

Mr. Howarth: Of the 32 National Greyhound Racing Club greyhound tracks currently in operation, four are owned by major off-course bookmakers.

Off-course Betting Shops

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bookmaking companies currently operate off-course betting shops in the United Kingdom. [12305]

Mr. Howarth: An estimated 1,793 off-course bookmaking companies currently operate in the United Kingdom.

Primary Purpose Rule

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has received regarding the changes made in the primary purpose rule on 5 June. [12346]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There has been much support for the abolition on 5 June of the primary purpose rule.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in implementing changes in the primary purpose rule. [11657]

Mr. O'Brien: The primary purpose rule was abolished on 5 June. A review of outstanding appeal cases has now been completed.

Huntingdon Life Sciences

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the revocation of the certificate of designation at Huntingdon Life Sciences involves both the company's sites; [12307]

(2) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newark (Ms Jones) of 24 July, *Official Report*, column *680*, if the baboons at Huntingdon Life Sciences are wild caught; [12465]

(3) how many project licences have been revoked at Huntingdon Life Sciences as a result of the Home Office investigation; [12296]

(4) what problems relating to the care, treatment and handling of animals at Huntingdon Life Sciences were found in animal departments other than the dog toxicology unit as a result of his Department's investigation. [12464]

Mr. George Howarth: I have written to the hon. Member.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newark (Ms Jones) of 24 July, *Official Report*, column *68*, what are the 16 stringent conditions his Department has set Huntingdon Life Sciences. [12466]

Mr. Howarth: The 16 conditions were:

(i) That a report be submitted to the Home Office setting out what changes have been introduced to the line management for and the responsibilities of the proposed certificate holder, to ensure that these arrangements do not compromise animal welfare.

(ii) That the applicant for a new certificate of designation has successfully completed module 1 of a Home Office accredited training course.

(iii) That summary findings of the Department of Health good laboratory practice scrutiny be disclosed by the establishment to the Home Office with confirmation that any process problems have been corrected.

(iv) That a written submission be made outlining how each of the standard conditions attached to all certificates of designation would be effectively and fully implemented.

(v) That adequate provision has been made for regular and effective means of communication between those entrusted with responsibilities under the Act.

(vi) That the applicant be required to satisfy the Home Office that line management arrangements for all animal care staff are effective. Specifically:

(a) that line managers are qualified by experience or training and informed of their responsibilities and the need for welfare related problems to be notified to an appropriate level within the company;

(b) that only trained and competent staff are entrusted with responsibility for the care and welfare of animals;

(c) that measures are in place to ensure that the certificate holder will be properly informed of conditions and practices within the designated areas.

(vii) That the applicant demonstrates that the staff appraisal reporting system for animal care staff ensures that concerns relating to animal welfare are properly identified and resolved and makes provision for periodic assessment that basic competencies have been maintained.

(viii) That the applicant supplies the Home Office with a general "process map" with overviews of the methods and resources to be used to ensure that reduction, refinement and replacement are adequately addressed in the design of animal studies performed at the establishment.

(ix) That, for new studies, a system is in place which ensures that adequate numbers of appropriately trained and licensed technical staff will be available.

(x) That a system is established to determine the nature, frequency and duration of visits by the named veterinary surgeon to the designated areas.

(xi) That a suitable named person for the dog facility is nominated.

(xii) That the applicant submits an enforceable code of conduct for the control of dogs, coupled with an effective means of reporting misconduct to an appropriate level within the organisation. This should be accompanied by evidence that all dog unit animal care staff have received appropriate training.

(xiii) That the applicant demonstrates that systems are in place to ensure that staff training in the handling and care of dogs ensures that structured training is delivered, that competence is demonstrably assessed and that only competent persons are entrusted with responsibility for animals' health and welfare.

(xiv) That the applicant submits standard operating procedures and protocols for the dog facilities relating to the housing, husbandry, care, restraint and performance of regulated procedures, with evidence that staff have successfully completed appropriate, structured training. This should include:

(a) a protocol for the group exercising of dogs which specifies the minimum daily exercise period per dog, defines the minimum amount of staff time to be used to socialise with the dogs and identifies the type of area provided for the exercise to take place:

(b) protocols for the restraint of dogs to enable intravenous dosing and sampling and the proper production of haemostasis thereafter. Evidence should be supplied that animal care staff have been appropriately trained or re-trained.

(xv) That the company has determined by internal benchmarking the principles which will determine and minimise the daily period for which pair-housed dogs will be held singly.

(xvi) That the applicant details any other measures which have or will be taken to provide environmental enrichment and a better quality of life for animals.

The company has now met these conditions and a new certificate of designation was issued on 29 September.

Identity Cards

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Association of Convenience Stores concerning a proposal for mandatory identity cards for young people; what response he has given; and if he will make a statement. [12289]

Mr. George Howarth: The Association's chief executive wrote to my right hon. Friend on 27 May asking the Government to introduce compulsory identity cards to assist retailers in determining the age of customers. I discussed this proposal with representatives of the association at a meeting on 18 June.

I subsequently wrote to the chief executive on 17 July, sending him a copy of the statement issued that day by the ministerial group on alcopops, which set out the Government's position on identity cards in the context of the Government's initiative on alcohol misuse by young people.

The statement made clear that the Government are considering the issues raised by national identity cards, but that these go wider than questions relating to sales of products to those under age. In any event, the introduction of national identity cards would require legislation and would not represent a short-term solution to concerns about the sale of alcohol to young people.

The statement welcomed the commitment of the association and other retail and liquor industry interests to expanding the existing Portman Group proof of age card scheme to tackle sales of alcohol to the under-18s.

I have just received a further letter from the association, which I am considering.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to publish a consultation document regarding the introduction of an identity card scheme. [12844]

Mr. George Howarth: We have no present plans to issue such a document.

North Yorkshire Police

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assist with the provision of radio communications for North Yorkshire police. [12338]

Mr. Michael: The police information technology organisation in the Home Office has provided assistance and advice to North Yorkshire police on its radio communications planning, prior to the implementation of the next generation of digital radio communications systems from 1999 onwards. This advice and assistance will continue.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the average times for processing criminal injuries compensation claims. [12515]

Mr. Michael: Claims under the criminal injuries compensation scheme vary greatly in their complexity. The straightforward ones may be determined in a matter of weeks, but those in which there are evidential difficulties or where the medical diagnosis or prognosis is uncertain may take several years to bring to a conclusion. Some will also be subject to an appeal. There is accordingly no meaningful average time for processing all cases. However, the victims charter sets a standard of 12 months from receipt of a claim to the issue of a first decision. The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority advises that, under the new tariff-based scheme, that standard has been met in 90 per cent. of claims received on or after 1 April 1996.

Alcohol Sales (Fundraising Events)

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the advantages of allowing charities and community groups to pay a single annual fee to register as entitled to sell alcohol at fundraising events. [12784]

Mr. George Howarth: The licensing laws were amended earlier this year to allow charities and other bodies to apply for more occasional permissions to sell alcohol at fundraising events.

We are willing to examine any specific proposals for further change which are put to us.

Algerian Nationals

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many Algerian nationals have been granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom in the past 12 months; [12790]

(2) how many Algerian nationals were refused asylum in the United Kingdom in the past 12 months; [12789]

(3) how many Algerian nationals have applied for asylum in the United Kingdom in the past 12 months. [12791]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is given in the table.

Decisions on applications[1] [2] for asylum in the United Kingdom from Algerian nationals, excluding dependants, in the 12 months between October 1996 and September 1997

	Number of principal applicants
Asylum applications	590
Total decisions[3]	1,090
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	60
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain[4]	10
Refusals	1,020

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five.

[2] Provisional figures.

[3] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the period.

[4] Usually granted for a year in the first instance, subject then to further review.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Algerian nationals are being held in detention centres in the United Kingdom. [12788]

Mr. O'Brien: As at 16 October 1997, a total of 23 Algerian nationals were detained in immigration detention centres. This figure excludes those detained under Immigration Act powers in prison establishments or in prison cells.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Algerian nationals are currently being held in custody in the United Kingdom for non-immigration offences. [12792]

Ms Quin: The latest available information is for 30 September 1997. On that date there were 25 Algerian nationals held in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for non-Immigration Act offences. information for Scotland and Northern Ireland is available from the respective Secretaries of State.

Old Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 8 July, *Official Report,* column *391,* if the review of the oldest document retained in the Home Office has been completed. [12865]

Mr. Straw: The review has been completed and I am pleased to say that the papers will be transferred to the Public Record Office and made available for public inspection later this year, subject to minor extractions. The extractions are intended to protect the identities of individual informants who put themselves at risk in the service of the state. It would not be in the public interest to reveal the identities of such individuals, since to do so might deter potential informants from assisting the authorities today. Of course, all the agents named in these records have long since died, but in many cases members of their families will still be alive and particularly in the context of Ireland, where memories can be deep and bitter, publication of the names cold cause unnecessary and gratuitous distress or worse.

Road Traffic Act 1988

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the enforcement of section 154 of the Road Traffic Act 1988; and if he will make a statement. [12798]

Mr. Michael: No representations have been received during the period of this Parliament.

Section 154 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 requires that a person against whom a motor insurance claim is made must on demand provide particulars of their insurance cover to the claimant. It is a criminal offence not to do so.

Police policy regarding the enforcement of section 154 is an operational matter for individual chief officers. The traffic committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers has recently considered this issue and takes the view that there should be a readiness to treat every allegation under section 154 on its merits before deciding what, if any, police action might be taken.

Immigration Rules

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what weight attaches to whether a child was conceived within a lawful marriage overseas in determining right of entry to the United Kingdom to join a parent who is a British national. [12491]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: None. A child may join a parent or parents who are present and settled in the United Kingdom provided the requirements of the immigration rules are met. It is not a requirement that the child was conceived within a lawful marriage.

Alcopops

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has commissioned into the ages of the purchasers of alcopops. [12309]

Mr. George Howarth: As the Government's announcement on 17 July made clear, we are concerned about the misuse of all kinds of alcohol by those under age. There is a range of existing research and regular surveys which already cover various aspects of under-age drinking. We are looking carefully at whether additional research is required.

Community Sentences

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders who withheld their consent from community sentences received custodial sentences in the most recent year for which figures are available. [12716]

Mr. Michael: Information is not collected centrally and no national data are available. However, the indications are that the number of offenders withholding consent to a community sentence is very small. For example, a recent survey of pre-sentence reports by Teesside probation service found that consent was withheld in only four of 854 cases. For those who do refuse consent, custody is the most likely sentence.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for new community sentences. [12715]

Mr. Michael: This Government plan to increase the effectiveness of community sentences and the range of options available to the courts.

On 1 October, new provisions came into effect allowing courts to impose an attendance centre order on fine defaulters who are aged under 25. Other provisions of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 will be piloted in Norfolk and Greater Manchester from January next year. These include provisions allowing for the imposition of a community service order or curfew order on fine defaulters and persistent petty offenders, disqualification of offenders from driving regardless of the offence committed and the imposition of curfew orders of up to three-months duration on offenders under the age of 16.

We are also studying other community sentence options which will reinforce the sentencing armoury, particularly with regards to youth crime. Our proposals for young offenders were set out in the consultation paper "Tackling Youth Crime" published in September. We will introduce an action plan order—which will be a focused and intensive intervention. There will also be a new reparation order which will require young people to make reparation to victims.

Policemen (Salaries)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average salary of a policeman with five years' service. [12692]

Mr. Michael: Police pay in England and Wales is based on national pay scales. Pay rates are negotiated each year by the Police Negotiating Board and approved by the Secretary of State. The national salary for a constable with five years' service, with effect from 1 September 1997, is £19,434.

Sentences

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his statement of 30 July, *Official Report*, column 257, if the explanation of what a sentence means in practice will be communicated to the victims of the crime concerned who are not present in court at the time sentence is passed. [12726]

Mr. Michael: The victims charter already provides for victims to be told, if they want to be, the final result of their offender's trial. Pilot projects to test how best this might be achieved have been running for several months and a full evaluation should be available by next spring. Before then, we will consider whether it might be practicable to include additional information about what the sentence means in practice.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his statement of 30 July, *Official Report*, column 257, if he will state what new bail conditions he proposes to introduce. [12713]

Mr. Michael: We propose to introduce two new bail conditions to deter bailed defendants from failing to appear in court or from failing to take the necessary steps to enable the case to proceed. The first measure will allow for the greater use of securities, to provide a stronger incentive for defendants to surrender to the custody of the court. The second measure will allow the courts to impose a condition of bail requiring a defendant to attend an interview with a legal representative in advance of a court hearing. Failure to obtain legal advice is one of the most common reasons for delay, resulting in ineffective first hearings and routine adjournments.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1), pursuant to his statement of 30 July, *Official Report*, column 257, what plans he has to assess the level of public confidence in his proposals for the courts to explain sentence lengths; [12602]

(2) if *(a)* courts will be required to explain sentences and *(b)* the period of a sentence served in custody will relate more closely to the lengths of sentence passed under his proposals for honesty in sentencing. [12718]

Mr. Michael: Our proposal that the courts should spell out what each sentence really means in practice was a manifesto commitment which was endorsed by the electorate. The proposal is to enable the public to know how long an offender will spend in prison, the period of supervision after release, and the period during which he may be recalled to prison.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the offences covered by sentencing guidelines from the Court of Appeal. [12728]

Mr. Michael: It is difficult to draw up a definitive list of offences for which sentencing guidelines are currently available, since the form and content of sentencing guidelines differ and the Court of Appeal also provides guidance on the treatment of offences through its more general cases. However, guidelines providing general guidance to the courts on the treatment of particular criminal offences, and in some cases suggesting starting points for sentences, have been provided by the Court of Appeal for a number of categories of offences, including: most sexual offences, including rape, unlawful sexual intercourse, incest, indecent assault and buggery; drugs offences involving class A and class B drugs; robbery, theft and benefit fraud; public order offences, including riot, violent disorder and affray; and explosives offences.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his statement of 30 July, *Official Report*, column 257, (1) if the sentencing guidelines to be prepared by the Court of Appeal will operate in the lower courts in the same way as the sentencing guidelines which have already been laid down; [12703]

(2) how the sentencing guidelines to be prepared by the Court of Appeal will affect the Magistrates' Association guidelines on sentencing; [12714]

(3) if he will list those offences which will be covered by sentencing guidelines from the Court of Appeal. [12601]

Mr. Michael: The Government are committed through their manifesto to placing a duty on the Court of Appeal to ensure there are sentencing guidelines for all the main offences. We are currently considering how best to take forward this commitment.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend the Attorney-General's power to refer sentences to the Court of Appeal for review. [12729]

Mr. Michael: We are in discussion with colleagues about the best way to implement our manifesto commitment to extend the Attorney-General's powers to refer cases to the Court of Appeal for review where it appears to him that the sentence is unduly lenient.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals, apart from those of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997, he has to ensure stricter punishment for serious repeat offenders. [12712]

Mr. Michael: Mr right hon. Friend's proposals were set out in his statement of 30 July to the House.

Violent Crime

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which year since 1967 the largest percentage increase in recorded crimes of violence against the person occurred. [12733]

Mr. Michael: The largest percentage increase was between 1968 and 1969 when violence against the person rose by 25 per cent.

Stephen Lawrence

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will invite the former Attorney-General to make available to the Macpherson inquiry notes of the meeting with two hon. Members and the Crown Prosecution Service following the withdrawal of proceedings against persons accused of murdering Stephen Lawrence; [12589]

(2) if the Macpherson inquiry will be provided with details of earlier attacks thought to be connected with persons accused of murdering Stephen Lawrence. [12590]

Mr. Michael: The judicial inquiry will have powers under section 49 of the Police Act 1996 to summon any person to give evidence, to require the production of documents and to take evidence on oath. It is therefore a matter for Sir William Macpherson, the chairman of the inquiry, to decide which documents the inquiry requires.

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will institute an award in the memory of Stephen Lawrence. [12591]

Mr. Michael: When my right hon. Friend met Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence on 24 June, he told them that they would have his support if they wished to establish some form of memorial to their son Stephen.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average annual percentage change in recorded crime, excluding criminal damage valued at £20 and under between *(a)* 1967 and 1979 and *(b)* 1979 and 1996. [12734]

Mr. Michael: The average annual percentage change was 3.5 per cent. between 1967 and 1979 and 4.3 per cent. between 1979 and 1996.

Crime (Sentences) Act 1997

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) of 30 July, *Official Report*, columns *261-62*, if he will set out the timetable for his review of section 4 (Minimum Sentences for Persistent House Burglars) of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997. [12743]

Mr. Michael: We have no plans to review section 4 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997. As my right hon. Friend made clear in his statement on criminal justice on 30 July, *Official Report*, column *354*, our position is the same as that announced by the previous Government in their White Paper, presented to the House in April 1996, which said:

> "The Government's objective is to implement the various proposals, taking account of the Parliamentary timetable, the need to provide additional prison places and the resource implications".

It is not a question of a review, but of whether and when it is appropriate to take action, bearing in mind those considerations.

Prisoners (Costs)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average cost of keeping a prisoner in custody in *(a)* a high security prison, *(b)* a normal security prison, *(c)* an open prison and *(d)* a young offenders institution in the last year for which figures are available. [12721]

Ms Quin: In the financial year 1996–97 the average cost for keeping a prisoner in custody was as shown in the table:

Type of prison	*Cost per prisoner (£)*
Dispersals	36,601
Category B	19,284
Category C	—
Local	—
Open	16,865
Young offenders institution	19,273

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which his Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12556]

Mr. Straw: In the non-agency Home Office payments are made both centrally and locally. Central payments are processed by the Department's business accounting strategic system, BASS, which uses Ross Renaissance software; 98.31 per cent. of payments by value are processed via the bank automated clearing system. The cost of processing central payments is estimated at £144,800. Payments to other Government Departments are made via Paymaster.

Payments may also be made locally by cheque or, exceptionally, by cash. Information on the cost of processing local payments is not available.

The Forensic Science Service is self accounting and is responsible for paying all of its suppliers for the services and goods it consumes. All payments are processed using the Systems Union accounting package, SUN. Of the payments made, 65.5 per cent. are via BACS the remainder being made by cheque. Any payments to other Government Departments are made by cheque. The cost of processing these payments is estimated at £48,000.

Within the United Kingdom Passport Agency, payments are made centrally by cheque, using SUN accounting software supplied by Systems Union. This includes payments to all other Government Departments. Operation of the payment function of the SUN system, including staff costs, was approximately £34,250 in 1996–97.

In the Prison Service payments are made both centrally and locally. Central payments are processed by the Prison Service's finance outstations and central unified system, FOCUS, which uses Tetra Chameleon software; 92.5 per cent. of payments by value are processed via BACS. The cost of processing central payments is estimated at £83,000; 98 per cent. of payments to other Government Departments are made via Paymaster.

Payments are also made locally at establishments by cheque or, exceptionally, by cash. Information on the cost of processing local payments is not available.

All Fire Service College payments are made locally at the college by cheque, except for expense claims under £10 which are paid in cash. All cheque payments are processed by the College's purchase ledger department, which uses CEDARDATA financial software; 89.2 per cent. of payments by value are paid by cheque, and payments to Her Majesty's Paymaster General in respect of loan interest is paid by Lloyds bank funds flow. The cost of processing all payments is estimated at £32,850.

If my hon. Friend is interested in particular aspects of our payment processing systems, perhaps he would write to me with further details.

Crime Clear-up and Conviction Rates

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the crime clear-up and conviction rates for each policy authority area in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996. [12588]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is given in the tables. These figures are not on a comparable basis because the clear-up data relate to the number of offences and the conviction rate date relate to the number of offenders.

Table 1: Clear up rates for notifiable offences by police force area 1995 and 1996[1]

Police force area	*1995*	*1996*
Avon and Somerset	23	24
Bedfordshire	22	33
Cambridgeshire	19	24
Cheshire	31	34
Cleveland	25	24
Cumbria	40	36
Derbyshire	20	21
Devon and Cornwall	27	30
Dorset	28	27
Durham	30	30
Essex	33	29
Gloucestershire	27	23
Greater Manchester	24	17
Hampshire	28	28
Hertfordshire	28	30
Humberside	19	20
Kent	26	32
Lancashire	34	33
Leicestershire	29	31
Lincolnshire	39	42
London, City of	23	27
Merseyside	27	29
Metropolitan Police	25	23
Norfolk	31	32
Northamptonshire	28	34
Northumbria	23	24
North Yorkshire	23	25
Nottinghamshire	23	28
South Yorkshire	24	23
Staffordshire	32	34
Suffolk	34	33
Surrey	31	29
Sussex	28	29
Thames Valley	23	25
Warwickshire	25	24
West Mercia	28	26
West Midlands	24	23
West Yorkshire	21	24
Wiltshire	32	29
England	26	26
Dyfed Powys	57	58
Gwent	50	50
North Wales	32	33
South Wales	29	32
Wales	34	37
England and Wales	26	26

[1] Per cent. of recorded crimes cleared up by police.

Table 2: Conviction rates[1] *for indictable offences by police force area 1995 and 1996*[2]

Police force area	*1995*	*1996*[2]
Avon and Somerset	61	55
Bedfordshire	61	65
Cambridgeshire	61	61
Cheshire	72	71
Cleveland	65	61
Cumbria	70	70
Derbyshire	65	62
Devon and Cornwall	64	63
Dorset	65	65

Table 2: Conviction rates[1] for indictable offences by police force area 1995 and 1996[2]

Police force area	*1995*	*1996[2]*
Durham	66	66
Essex	66	64
Gloucestershire	63	65
Greater Manchester	69	69
Hampshire	68	68
Hertfordshire	63	66
Humberside	73	69
Kent	83	83
Lancashire	67	65
Leicestershire	55	59
Lincolnshire	74	70
London, City of	56	62
Merseyside	60	62
Metropolitan Police	65	65
Norfolk	88	83
Northamptonshire	58	59
Northumbria	64	64
North Yorkshire	74	70
Nottinghamshire	62	61
South Yorkshire	67	69
Staffordshire	62	61
Suffolk	67	65
Surrey	69	69
Sussex	69	66
Thames Valley	60	61
Warwickshire	64	66
West Mercia	68	67
West Midlands	62	61
West Yorkshire	62	60
Wiltshire	78	86
England	65	65
Dyfed Powys	57	57
Gwent	64	61
North Wales	70	68
South Wales	60	61
Wales	62	62
England and Wales	65	65

[1] Number of offenders convicted at all courts as a proportion per cent. of defendants prosecuted at magistrates' courts.
[2] Provisional.

Fire Service Pensions

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to publish the review of fire service pensions; and if he will make a statement. [12741]

Mr. George Howarth: We have undertaken to publish the review as a basis for consultation with fire service interests on the future arrangement for fire service pensions. It will be issued as soon as is practicable.

HEALTH

Huntingdon Life Sciences

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many experimental studies at Huntingdon Life Sciences have been invalidated as a result of his Department's investigation; and what was the fate of the animals involved. [12297]

Ms Jowell: The United Kingdom's Good Laboratory Practice Monitoring Authority has investigated Huntingdon Life Sciences. The authority decided that five toxicity studies within the dog toxicology unit did not meet good laboratory practice standards. The authority has required the company to notify each study's sponsors accordingly.

On completion of the studies, the dogs will be put down humanely in accordance with normal practice.

Abortion Act 1967

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the working of the Abortion Act 1967. [12579]

Ms Jowell: Data on all terminations of pregnancy and the non-national health service places which provide abortion continue to be monitored by the Department.

Hospital Beds (Reopening Costs)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost of reopening a bed in a general ward of a hospital. [12693]

Mr. Milburn: The costs would depend on a number of factors including geographical location, the level of staffing required to open the bed, when the bed was required—weekend or overnight.

Nurses' Salaries

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average salary of a nurse with five years' experience. [12694]

Mr. Milburn: Nurses' salaries are dependent on a wide range of factors such as grade and length of service. It is therefore not possible to provide the average salary of a nurse with five years' experience. However, current salary rates are published in advance letter (NM) 1/97, copies of which are available in the Library. Additionally, new earnings survey figures for 1996 show that the average gross weekly earnings of a full-time nurse on adult rates was £325.70.

Operation Costs

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average cost of *(a)* a hip replacement operation, *(b)* a cataract operation and *(c)* a heart bypass operation in the last year for which figures are available. [12723]

Mr. Milburn: The information is given in the following table:

Average costs

Operation	*In-patient case* £	*Day case* £
Hip replacement[1]		
primary	3,290	—
revision	4,330	—
Cataract[2]	900	475
Coronary artery by-pass graft	5,930	—

[1] 1996–97
[2] 1994–95

Official Hospitality

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total expenditure on official hospitality by his Department to date in the current session. [12582]

Mr. Milburn: Expenditure on hospitality for the period 1 May 1997 to 30 September 1997 is as follows.

	£
Department	41,803
Agencies	7,159
Total	48,962

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods services supplied for which his Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12558]

Mr. Milburn: The process for making payments for goods and services forms the latter part of the purchasing process. The Department of Health has developed procurement procedures based upon guidance issued by Her Majesty's Treasury and those procedures are designed to ensure probity and fairness in procurement decisions. The processing of payments and the issue of payable instruments form part of the Department's accounting systems. The procedures for both placing orders and making payments to suppliers requires the necessary certification and authorisation that ensures an adequate separation of duties, thus conforming with Government accounting.

The Department does not use sub-contractors for payment work nor have co-operative arrangements with other departments for the payment of goods and services. The payment of welfare foods benefit does involve both the Benefit Agency in the issue of welfare milk tokens and a contractor to authorise payments against surrendered tokens. The Benefits Agency also authorises payments on the Department's behalf in respect of European Economic Area medical costs.

The Department's accounting system is based on a proprietary accounting package—Sun Accounts—amended by departmental staff to meet specific needs. The Department makes some 180,000 payments a year, which include payments to health authorities, local authorities, non-departmental public bodies and voluntary organisations. Payments to other Government Departments and health authorities are made by means of transfers. Whenever possible, other payments are made by means of bank automated clearing system and the remainder are paid by payable order.

The accounts payable and cashiering applications which support departmental payments form part of the accounting system and specific capital and development costs of the computer systems are not therefore readily available. The salary costs of providing a cashiering service are estimated to be £216,000 for 1997–98.

The Department has four executive agencies and the following table summarises the position of each.

	Medicines Control Agency	*Medical Devices Agency*	*NHS Estates Agency*	*NHS Pensions Agency*
Contracting arrangements for payments	None	None	None	The payment of medical fees to independent advisers form part of the total service provided
Co-operative arrangements with other government departments	None	None	None	None
Estimated costs of making payments	£105,000	£30,000	£40,000	£15,000

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that the independent review panel considering the future of St. Bartholomew's hospital will be allowed a fully day for visits and discussions at the hospital. [12294]

Mr. Milburn: The review panel visited the Royal Hospitals NHS trust on 4 September 1997 for a full day. This included visits to the St. Bartholomew's hospital and Royal London hospital sites. The members of the panel also made further visits to the London chest hospital, St. Bartholomew's and other London sites later that month.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the arrangements made by the Royal Hospitals NHS trust for the independent review panel to visit St. Bartholomew's hospital. [12293]

Mr. Milburn: Ministers have not been involved in the detailed arrangements made for visits by the independent review panel, but we understand that the arrangements for the panel's visit to the Royal Hospitals NHS trust on 4 September 1997 were satisfactory.

Liverpool Blood Services

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will be announcing his decision about the future of the Liverpool blood transfusion service; and if he will make a statement. [12287]

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly from clinicians and their professional associations since 1 May in respect of the proposals to remove blood processing and testing from the Liverpool blood centre; and if he will publish those representations. [12295]

Mr. Boateng: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has announced the setting up of an independent review into clinical concerns raised about the proposals for the transfer of bulk processing and testing of blood from Liverpool to Manchester. Professor John Cash, president of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and former director of the blood transfusion service in Scotland, is leading that review.

On 8 September, Professor Cash submitted an urgent interim report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in which he advised that, given that the original plans were then largely implemented, and in particular the run-down of experienced and skilled staff in the Liverpool centre,

> "it is now in the best interests of patients in Merseyside and the surrounding area that the transfer of bulk blood processing and testing to Manchester goes ahead as planned on 19 September."

On 9 September, the Secretary of State announced his reluctant acceptance of that recommendation on grounds of patient safety.

However, the Secretary of State also made it clear that that was not the end of the matter. Professor Cash is to make a final report in November, when he will advise on how blood services can be developed to meet the needs of people in Merseyside and the surrounding areas as well as the requirements of local clinicians. Meanwhile, two steps have already been taken to aid that development. In line with the interim recommendations made by Professor Cash, the Secretary of State announced in September the appointment of two experts, Professor Alistair Bellingham and Dr. Ian Gilmore, to two critical new posts. Their respective roles are transition director of the Liverpool blood centre, and chair of a Merseyside and area clinical user group set up to monitor the quality of blood services in Merseyside and north Wales. Both Professor Bellingham and Dr. Gilmore have an important part to play in working with local clinicians to ensure the safety and the reliability of the supply of blood components to local hospitals.

We shall decide what further measures may be required when we have seen Professor Cash's final report.

As regards the number of representations which Ministers have received from clinicians on this issue, as I said in my reply to a similar question from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) on 1 July, column *145*, separate records are not kept of the particular categories of people who make such representations. We estimate, however, that we have received around 24 representations from different clinicians or their professional associations since 1 May 1997. Copies have been passed to Professor Cash for him to consider as part of his review. They will not be published separately.

Dental Access Fund

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Government proposes to repeat the provision of the dental access fund for 1997–98. [12755]

Mr. Milburn: No. On 9 September, we announced the "Investing in Dentistry" initiative, which makes available up to £9 million in 1997–98 to help dentists expand existing or set up new practices in areas of the country where there are particular problems with the availability of national health service dental services.

NHS Trusts (Board Meetings)

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State of Health what steps he took to consult NHS trusts before issuing his instructions to hold board meetings in public. [12797]

Mr. Milburn: In reaching his decision, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health took account of the fact that all health authorities and a significant proportion of national health service trusts already hold board meetings in public.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from NHS trust boards following his instructions to hold board meetings in public; and if he will publish the content of these submissions. [12796]

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has received a number of letters about trust board meetings, both in favour and against. It is for those making the representations to decide whether they should be published.

Ambulance Service Personnel

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State of Health how many ambulance service personnel have taken early retirement on health grounds in each of the last five years; and what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the subject; and if he will make a statement. [12775]

Mr. Milburn: In the five-year period up to 24 February 1997, the national health service pension scheme awarded ill-health retirement benefits to 2,576 ambulance personnel retiring from NHS ambulance trusts in England and Wales. A year-on-year breakdown is not available.

In the last five years, the Department of Health has not commissioned any research on ambulancemen retiring early from the NHS on health grounds.

Prescriptions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average number of items prescribed to individuals aged 65 years and over in each year since 1985. [12794]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is available in the statistical bulletins, *Statistics of prescriptions dispensed in the Family Health Service Authorities: England 1985 to 1995*, (statistical bulletin in 1996/17 July 1996) and *Statistics of prescriptions dispensed in the community: England 1986 to 1996*, (statistical bulletin 1997/15 July 1997), both of which are available in the Library. Before 20 October 1995, the term "elderly people" meant women aged 60 years or over and men aged 65 and over. Since then, however, men aged 60 and over are also included in this group, but the population figures for 1995 are still for men aged 65 years and over and women aged 60 and over. The 1985 to 1990 prescription data are based on fees, while 1991–1995 prescription data are based on items.

H. Pylori

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reimburse general practitioners for testing for H. pylori. [12780]

Mr. Milburn: Under the terms of a general practitioner's cost plus contract, all expenses incurred in the delivery of general medical services are reimbursed either directly to the general practitioner who incurs the cost or indirectly, at the average for the profession as a whole, through fees and allowances.

General practitioners are free to use any of the test kits for H. pylori if they feel it clinically appropriate, and the profession will receive reimbursement for their costs through fees and allowances.

The Government have no plans to change these arrangements.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in the United Kingdom resulted from contaminated implements during surgical procedures. [12493]

Ms Jowell: In the United Kingdom two incidents involving a total of three patients are known where Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease is presumed to have been transmitted by neurosurgical instruments. Both incidents occurred in the 1950s.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish his Department's latest figures for trends in suspected and confirmed cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in the United Kingdom. [12492]

Ms Jowell: The latest figures on the number of cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, including new variant CJD, in the United Kingdom were published in a Department of Health press release on 6 October 1997, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

The fifth annual report of the national Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease surveillance unit published on 15 September 1997 showed that there has been an increase in the number of cases of classic sporadic CJD recorded in England and Wales for the period 1970 to April 1996, with the greatest increase reported in those over the age of 75. Substantial increases in the reported incidence of classic CJD have also been observed in other countries which monitor the disease, including countries where bovine spongiform encephalopathy is rare or absent. These increases are most likely to reflect improved case ascertainment, especially in the older age groups, rather than a real increase in the disease.

GP Fundholder Budget Allocations

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the outcomes of the appeals process for fundholder budget allocations for the past five years by regional office, showing how many appeals found in favour of *(a)* GP fundholders and *(b)* regional offices for each area. [12486]

Mr. Milburn: When a fundholding practice receives its proposed budget offer for the coming year, the regulations require it to notify the health authority whether or not it accepts the offer. Although this is not a formal appeals process established by regulations, in practice most rejections are treated as appeals by regional offices. Similar procedures were followed before April 1996, when regional health authorities were responsible for budget offers.

Information is available on the results of such "appeals" in respect of budget proposals for 1996–97 and 1997–98. A table summarising this information is as follows.

Summary of representations on GPFH/Regional Office budget allocations 1996–97—1997–98

	1996–97 Principally in favour of		*1997–98 Principally in favour of*	
	GPFH	*RO*	*GPFH*	*RO*
Northern and Yorkshire	2	8	10	31
Trent	—	—	—	—
Anglia and Oxford	—	1	1	7
West Midlands	1	1	2	3
South and West	1	11	8	16
North Thames	3	6	1	1
South Thames	5	27	1	38
North West	—	—	—	2
Total	12	54	23	98

These figures are not strictly comparable between regions due to different methods of dealing with likely problems in the setting of budgets. Some regions have a policy of addressing differences between the policy of the health authority and the fundholder to resolve disputes before a formal offer is made. In addition where a multifund (where a larger number of fundholders join together to apply the budget) have appealed en-masse, this might be counted as one appeal, or as individual appeals.

Often an appeal has no definite resolution for either side—elements of both arguments my be accepted, and the decision does not, in reality, come down one way or another. However, where a decision by the RO has been largely in favour of the GPFH this is reflected in the table.

Source:

NHS Executive Regional Offices

Maternity Services (North Staffordshire)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what changes in procedures to maternity services have been introduced in north Staffordshire in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement; [12350]

(2) if he will investigate staffing levels at the North Staffordshire maternity unit during holiday periods, weekends and between 5 pm and 9 am weekdays; and if he will make a statement; [12351]

(3) what investigations have been undertaken into maternity services and procedures in north Staffordshire. [12766]

Ms Jowell: Following concerns expressed by staff working within the trust, North Staffordshire Hospital NHS trust conducted a management review of maternity services, which reported in May 1997. As a result of this review, a number of improvements have been implemented by the trust to both procedures and staffing arrangements, including the introduction of a new model of woman-centred care, additional staff in community midwifery, and improved cover arrangements at labour suites. There are no reductions in staffing at weekends or on bank holidays. All these changes are aimed at improving maternity services for patients.

Brain-damaged Babies

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of babies were born with brain damage in North Staffordshire in each of the last five years; [12349]

(2) if he will publish figures on the incidence of babies born with brain damage in north Staffordshire in each of the last five years. [12765]

Mr. Boateng: The estimate, from the latest available data, of the percentage of babies born in North Staffordshire reported as having infantile brain damage is as follows:

	Percentage
1989–90	0.3
1990–91	0.4
1991–92	0.6
1992–93	0.4
1993–94	0.1
1994–95	0.5

Source:

Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics.

Note:

Infantile brain damage is defined using the following International Classification of Diseases Codes Ninth Revision (ICD 9).

Infantile cerebral palsy: 343.0 to 9.

Birth trauma:

767.0 Subdural and cerebral haemorrhage.

779.0 Convulsions in newborn.

779.1 Other and unspecified cerebral irritability in newborn.

779.2 Cerebral depression, coma and other abnormal cerebral signs.

Corticosteroids

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidelines his Department issues to GPs prescribing systemic corticosteroids to patients who *(a)* have not been exposed to chickenpox and *(b)* are pregnant; and if he will make a statement; [12924]

(2) if he will estimate how many and what percentage of people using corticosteroids carry a steroid treatment card; and if he will make a statement. [12926]

Mr. Milburn: Guidance on prescribing issues, including the use of systematic corticosteroids, is available to general practitioners from a variety of sources. Publications funded by the Department include the British National Formulary, which is regularly updated and provides advice for all doctors on the choice and safe use of corticosteroids. Copies of the BNF are available in the Library.

No information is available on the number of people using corticosteroids who carry steroid treatment cards.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have died from chickenpox in each of the last five years, indicating those cases in which the deceased had been using systematic corticosteroids when infected; and if he will make a statement. [12925]

Ms Jowell: The number of deaths from chickenpox in England and Wales reported to the Office for National Statistics are given in the following table:

Mortality for chickenpox in England and Wales 1992–96

Year	*Number of persons*
1992	27
1993	30
1994	23
1995	22
1996	39

Since 1993, ONS codes all the diseases, injuries, drugs, operations and external causes mentioned on death certificates by the certifying doctor or coroner, in addition to the underlying cause of death. Only one of the 114 deaths certified as due to chickenpox, from 1993 to 1996 inclusive, explicitly mentioned the use of corticosteroids. The timing of the drug treatment in relation to the date of infection is not available.

Iproniazid

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the link between iproniazid use and fatal liver damage; and if he will make a statement. [12908]

Ms Jowell: There are no current United Kingdom marketing authorisations for iproniazid. We are not aware of any research being undertaken in the UK into iproniazid.

The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Council. The MRC is an independent body which receives its grant in aid from the Office of Science and Technology, which is part of the Department of Trade and Industry. The council is not funding any research into iproniazid and fatal liver damage, and its scientific advisors are not aware of any other research on the topic.

Xenotransplantation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the members of the Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority and *(a)* their qualifications, *(b)* their other paid or voluntary employment and *(c)* their other current appointments; [12900]

(2) on what date membership of the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority was finalised; and if he will make a statement. [12901]

Mr. Boateng: The membership of the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority was announced through a Department of Health press release on 14 March 1997. No further appointments to the authority have been made. Details of its members, including their qualifications, their main paid employment and their membership of other Government committees are as follows:

CHAIRMAN

The Rt. Rev. and Rt. Hon. Lord HABGOOD of Calverton MA PhD

Retired, former Archbishop of York.

MEMBERS

Mr John DARK MB BS, FRCS (Edin), FRCS (Eng)

Consultant Cardiothoracic Surgeon, Director (Cardio-Pulm, Transplants)

Freeman Hospital, Newcastle.

Professor Herb SEWELL MB ChB, BDS, MSc, PhD, FRCP (Glas), FRCPath

Professor of Immunology Nottingham University. Formerly a Member of the Advisory Group on the Ethics of Xenotransplantation

Professor George GRIFFIN BSc (hons), PhD, MB BS

Professor of Infectious Disease, St. George's Hosp. Member of the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens, Member of the Public Health Laboratory Service Board.

Dr Maggy JENNINGS BSc, PhD

Head of Research Animals Department, RSPCA

Dr Janet M DEWDNEY OBE, BVSc, MRCVS, PhD, FI Biol, FRC Path

Chairman, AdProTech plc.

Professor Sheila MCLEAN LL B, M Litt, PhD, FRSE, FRSA

Professor Law and Ethics in Medicine, Glasgow University. Member, Scottish Higher Education Council, Secretary of State Appointee to the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, Appointed to undertake a Review of the current provisions in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990, "Consent and the Law".

Mrs Jean GAFFIN OBE, JP, BSc, MSc

Executive Director of the National Council for Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care Services

Dr David COOK MA, Phd

Director, Whitefield Institute, Oxford. Fellow and Chaplain, Green College, Oxford.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations his Department has received *(a)* supporting and *(b)* against xenotransplantation during the consultation period on his Department's advisory group on the ethics of xenotransplantation report; and if he will make a statement. [12902]

Mr. Boateng: Following the publication of "Animal Tissue into Humans", the report of the advisory group on the ethics of xenotransplantation, a consultation exercise was held which asked for submissions on several aspects of xenotransplantation, including the science and its regulation. Some 51 responses have been received. These contained detailed analysis of the issues raised by the report and cannot be classed as being either for or against xenotransplantation. Copies of all those responses not made in confidence will be placed in the Library in due course, following consideration of the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority's advice. In addition to the responses to the consultation exercise, we have received around 15,000 postcards registering opposition to xentransplantation on both medical and ethical grounds.

Artificial Organ Transplants

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many transplants involving artificial organs have been carried out in each of the last 10 years, broken down by health authority district; and if he will make a statement. [12907]

Mr. Boateng: There have been several small trials of artificial organs as alternatives to organ transplantation, but, so far, none of the available artificial organs offers a satisfactory alternative.

Novelty Condoms

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the health risk posed by the availability of novelty condoms from vending machines in entertainment venues and public lavatories; and if he will make a statement; [12916]

(2) what plans he has to restrict the availability of novelty condoms from vending machines in entertainment venues and public lavatories; [12917]

(3) if he will meet representatives from the medical profession and AIDS charities to discuss the risk posed by the availability of novelty condoms in vending machines in entertainment venues and public lavatories; and if he will make a statement. [12918]

Ms Jowell: Novelty condoms are not recommended for use as a barrier to HIV-AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases or as a contraceptive. The Department of Health advises the public to use only condoms which carry either the British Standards Institute kitemark or the European CE mark. As novelty condoms are not classed as medical devices under the Medical Devices Regulations 1994, they should not carry the CE mark, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health cannot use his enforcement powers under these regulations to restrict their availability. However, any confusion and risk to health caused by novelty condoms being mistaken for genuine condoms would come within the scope of the General Product Safety Regulations 1994, which are enforced by local authority trading standards officers, if there is a significant risk that a novelty condom could be confused with the genuine article and give rise to the transmission of disease then, in the absence of adequate warnings about the hazard, the product could be deemed to be unsafe under the regulations.

We have not received any representations from the medical profession or AIDS charities to discuss novelty condoms, but we would be happy to consider such a request if approached.

Asbestosis

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the diagnostic features in the classification of asbestosis recognised by his Department. [12943]

Mr. Boateng: Diagnosis is a professional issue and we would look to the health care professions to provide guidance on it.

Organ, Blood and Bone Marrow Donation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on introducing an opt-out scheme allowing the surgical removal of organs unless the deceased has registered an objection in advance; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement. [12909]

Mr. Boateng: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Ms Jowell) gave my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 20 May 1997 at columns 504-05.

Ministers have met interested members of the medical profession and voluntary organisations involved in organ donation and transplantation to discuss this and other issues. Ministers have also received four letters on this subject from hon. Members and a number of letters from the public generally, in every case, our response has been that all views will be considered carefully before reaching a decision but that any steps taken must command public confidence.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate *(a)* how many and *(b)* what percentage of people in England (i) carry a donor card and (ii) are registered on the NHS organ donor register. [12903]

Mr. Boateng: Organ donor cards have been distributed freely by many organisations over the last 25 years. No record has ever been kept of who may possess them. However, public opinion surveys show consistently that around 30 per cent. of the population claim to carry an organ donor card.

At 18 October 1997, there were 3,685,000 English residents on the national health service organ donor register—7.6 per cent. of the population.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a scheme of paid leave entitlements for those donating bone marrow; and if he will make a statement. [12869]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have no plans to introduce a scheme of paid leave entitlements for those donating bone marrow. There are two bone marrow donation registers in this country; the British bone marrow register which recruits from blood donors and is funded through the national health service, and the Anthony Nolan bone marrow register which is funded and run by the Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust. Both registers meet all reasonable expenses of donors, including travelling and accommodation expenses and compensation for loss of earnings.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to encourage people to *(a)* carry donor cards, *(b)* register on the NHS organ donor register *(c)* give blood and *(d)* donate bone marrow; and if he will make a statement; [12904]

(2) if he will estimate how much has been spent on promoting *(a)* the use of donor cards, *(b)* the NHS organ donor register, *(c)* blood donation and *(d)* bone marrow donation in each of the last 10 years. [12905]

Mr. Boateng: No information is available on Department of Health publicity campaigns before 1989–90. No information is available about the sums spent on promoting bone marrow donation over the last 10 years, but some associated costs may be contained within the blood publicity budget. The information available is provided in the table. Within the organ donation publicity budget, it is not possible to identify separately the amounts spent on individual campaigns.

There are continuing campaigns to encourage positive attitudes towards tissue donation. During this year, the Department is promoting a wide range of measures designed to increase the number of regular blood donors through raising awareness of the need to maintain supplies of blood to hospitals. This includes the launch this year of a new three to five year publicity strategy, designed to increase the current donor base and thereby reduce the need for emergency appeals, and the development of an information pack for secondary schools, for use in association with the national curriculum, which we hope will help to secure the future donor base.

The over-riding aim of organ donation publicity campaigns is to encourage people to discuss their donation wishes with their families. Knowing the views of the deceased in advance makes it easier for relatives to agree that organs may be donated. People are also encouraged to register their wishes by joining the computerised NHS organ donor register, established in 1994. This register builds on earlier work to promote organ donor cards, which are still distributed with the NHS organ donor register leaflets. We are considering how best to use publicity monies to encourage donation.

Bone marrow donors are recruited through two organisations. The British bone marrow register is funded through the NHS and recruits from blood donors at blood donation sessions. The Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust is a charity funded by voluntary giving and recruits donors from the general public through local and national publicity campaigns.

£000

	National blood publicity	*Organ donation*
1989–90 outturn	641	252
1990–91 outturn	731	228
1991–92 outturn	1,032	211
1992–93 outturn	983	1,992
1993–94 outturn	1,578	1,313
1994–95 outturn	1,145	1,579
1995–96 outturn	1,345	1,653
1996–97 outturn	1,199	1,225
Total	8,654	8,453
1997–98 (estimate)	1,218	996

Smoking

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he plans to introduce to dissuade children from taking up smoking; and if he will make a statement. [12927]

Ms Jowell: The rise in smoking by young people, particularly teenage girls, is a grave concern. Measures directed at reducing children's smoking will be set out in the White Paper on tobacco control to be published next year.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 28 October 1997

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the effect on the number of recipients of family credit of cutting the taper to *(a)* 65 per cent., *(b)* 55 per cent. and *(c)* 50 per cent. [12814]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is in the table:

Level of taper (per cent.)	*Increase in number of family credit recipients (000s)*
65	35
55	175
50	285

1. Results are derived from the Policy Simulation Model based on the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey, uprated to 1997–98 caseload levels.
2. Caseload effects are rounded to the nearest 5,000 claimants.

Backdating

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will amend the rules for backdating of disability living allowance and attendance allowance to ensure that arrears from an any grounds or any time review can backdate the claim from the time of the claim. [12847]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The changes introduced in April 1997 inadvertently limited payment of arrears as a result of an "any grounds review" (requested within three months of a decision) on disability living allowance, disability working allowance and attendance allowance. Extra-statutory payments were made until amending regulations came into force on 13 October 1997.

Social Fund

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has for changing the regulations relating to social fund payments following the Social Security Commissioner's decision in the case of Mr. O'Flynn. [13299]

Mr. Denham: Amending regulations were laid yesterday. Earlier this year, the Social Security Commissioner decided that the provision, which restricted entitlement to a funeral payment provided the funeral took place within the United Kingdom, infringed European Community law.

The changes bring the legislation into line with European Community law. Where someone is living in this country, but originally came from another EEA country, they may be able to claim help with funeral expenses if they satisfy the existing eligibility criteria which apply to all other claimants. They may be able to get help if, and only if, the deceased person also lived here. Under the changes they will be able to claim if the funeral takes place in another EEA country. However, the amount paid will be limited to the amount which would have been paid had the funeral taken place where the deceased had lived in the United Kingdom.

A further change has been made to bring the provision into line with European Community law. The person arranging the funeral may also get help with travel costs to arrange or attend the funeral, but the amount allowable would not exceed the amount which would have been paid if the funeral had taken place locally.

A number of other minor changes have been made to restore, or clarify, the original policy intention.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Football Grounds

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is his Department's policy on the provision of standing areas at those football grounds where it is currently prohibited; with which bodies he has consulted; and if he will make a statement. [12955]

Mr. Fisher *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* There has been a great deal of debate recently about the re-introduction of standing accommodation for spectators at premier league and first division grounds. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport made clear in a statement last week, the Government have no plans to review the policy which requires clubs in the premier league and the first division to be all-seater, but which allows clubs in the second and third divisions of the Football League to retain some standing accommodation subject to stringent safety requirements.

The Taylor report identified all-seating as the factor which contributed most to spectator safety. We are, of course, prepared to listen to comments made about the provision of spectator accommodation, consulting relevant bodies such as the Football Licensing Authority as necessary, but we should be very careful before considering any change of policy.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Special Secure Units

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason there was a delay from June 1996 to May 1997 in implementing a system of three-monthly health reviews of prisoners detained in special secure units; what is the agreed format and content of these reviews; how many prisoners have been examined to date; and what percentage of the total special secure unit population this represents. [12605]

Ms Quin: The special secure unit operating standards were amended in January 1997 to provide that the health of prisoners detained in SSUs should be formally reviewed at three-monthly intervals. Detailed discussion about the content and format of health reviews and related disclosure issues were not concluded until April 1997. Instructions were issued to prison medical officers and the first reviews took place in May 1997.

The process of formal review does not replace the existing arrangements for the health care of prisoners in SSUs which is comparable to that elsewhere in the prison service. The three-monthly reviews are designed to collate information gathered over the review period, assess the health of each prisoner, identity any areas of concern and initiate any necessary remedial action. Reports from outside specialists may be commissioned where necessary. A summary of the three-monthly review report along with any health care recommendations is given to each prisoner.

In May 1997 there were 23 exceptional risk prisoners held in SSUs. Reviews were carried out on all of these prisoners. There are now only six exceptional risk prisoners in England and Wales, all of whom are held in the Whitemoor SSU. Subsequent reviews have been carried out on these prisoners.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average total cost per year of maintaining a prisoner in a special secure unit. [12606]

Ms Quin: The average total cost[1] per prisoner place in a special secure unit is estimated to be approximately £61,000 per annum for the year ending 31 March 1997, the period for which the last detailed analysis was carried out.

[1] Average total cost represents the cost per SSU accommodation place certified to hold prisoners in an establishment.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are currently held in special secure units; for how long each prisoner has been held in such units; and what is the nationality of each such prisoner. [12607]

Ms Quin: The table shows the six prisoners held in the special secure unit at Whitemoor. There are currently no other prisoners held in SSUs.

Nationality	*Offence*	*Time spent in SSU*
American	Conspiracy to murder	2 years 7 months
Colombian	Customs evasion	4 months
British	Armed robbery	9 years 3 months
Cypriot	Customs evasion	4 years 2 months
Irish Republic	Importation of drugs	1 year 11 months
British	Importation of drugs	1 year 11 months

Parole Board

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has made provision for those detained during Her Majesty's pleasure to have their cases considered by the Parole Board at oral hearings. [13297]

Mr. Straw: The Parole Board Rules 1997, which were made on 6 October 1997 under section 32(5) of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, came into force on 6 October. A copy of the rules has been placed in the Library.

The rules apply to those detained during Her Majesty's pleasure and to all discretionary lifers, including those sentenced under section 2 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997.

Apart from minor changes to statutory references and interpretation, the rules are identical to their predecessors, the Parole Board Rules 1992.

Parliamentary Boundary Commission

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whom he intends to appoint to the vacant post of commissioner at the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England. [13300]

Mr. George Howarth: I am very pleased to announce that we have appointed Mr. Michael Lewer QC to serve as a Commissioner at the commission. His appointment is effective until 31 December 2000.

Prison Service

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the business plan for the Prison Service for 1997–98. [13301]

Mr. Straw: I am publishing today the Prison Service's business plan for 1997–98, including the key performance targets I have set.

I recognise the pressure under which the service is now operating. The audit of resources which I published on 25 July made it clear that the key assumptions on which the service had been planning for the current year, particularly the size of the prison population, have already been overtaken. I announced on 24 July an increase in Prison Service funding this year and next year to help meet these pressures. At the same time, work underway as part of the comprehensive spending review, the study of ways of closer working between the Probation and Prison Services—which I announced on 16 July—and other policy developments in the criminal justice field will all have long-term implications for the service, which makes long-term planning difficult.

For these reasons, I have decided not to publish a three-year corporate plan this year. Instead I am publishing a business plan which sets out clear targets and priorities for this year but does not significantly change the longer-term objectives previously set for the service and focuses on the need to accommodate the prison population safely while maintaining balanced, positive regimes so far as possible. I will shortly discuss with the Director General the priorities and direction for the service for the next three years, which will be reflected in the corporate plan for 1998–2001.

The plan includes the performance targets against which the service has been operating so far this year. The majority will require some improvement on last year's performance, but I recognise that the further rapid rise in prisoner numbers so far this year, well ahead of the assumptions made when the plan was drafted, will have an impact on performance.

The targets are:

Escapes

To ensure no category A prisoners escape.

To ensure that the number of escapes from prisons and from escorts, expressed as a proportion of the prison population, is lower than in 1996–97.

Assaults

To ensure that the number of assaults on staff, prisoners and others, expressed as a proportion of the average population, is lower than 9 per cent.

Drugs

To ensure that the rate of positive testing for drugs (the number of random drug tests that prove positive expressed as a proportion of the total number of random tests carried out) is lower than in 1996–97.

Overcrowding

To ensure that the percentage of the prison population above the uncrowded capacity of the estate is no more than 13 per cent.

Time unlocked

To ensure that by 31 March 1998 at least 60 per cent. of prisoners are held in establishments which normally unlock all prisoners on the standard or enhanced regime for at least 10 hours per week day.

Offending behaviour programmes

To ensure that there are at least 2,200 completions by prisoners of programmes accredited as being effective in reducing re-offending, of which 670 should be completions of the sex offender treatment programmes.

Cost per place

To achieve at least a 1.3 per cent. reduction in real terms in cost per place compared to 1996–97, ensuring that the average cost of a prison place does not exceed £24,610.

Staff training

To ensure that, on average, staff spend at least six days in training.

I have also set a target on purposeful activity, to ensure that prisoners spend on average at least 22.5 hours per week engaged in purposeful activity. This target takes account of work to improve the accuracy of these figures. Because of this, this year's target is not directly comparable with performance in previous years, but it is intended to maintain performance at the level delivered last year.

I regard it as extremely important that prisons provide a full day's constructive and challenging activity for prisoners, and I shall be asking the Director General to consider how he can improve on this targeting the years ahead. But I do recognise that the population pressures facing the service make it unrealistic to set a higher target in 1997-98.

Prisoner Transfers

Ms Blears: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what basis prisoners will be transferred between United Kingdom jurisdictions and the islands, following the introduction of schedule 1 to the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997. [13304]

Mr. Straw: The Government attach considerable importance to enabling prisoners to maintain family ties while serving their sentences. As part of a number of measures to facilitate family contact, there is provision for prisoners to transfer to another United Kingdom jurisdiction, or to one of the islands, where they have close family members.

The Criminal Justice Act 1961 provided for inter-jurisdictional transfers to be made on either a permanent or a temporary basis. Permanent transfers were normally refused where, as a consequence of differing early release provisions applying in the various jurisdictions, a reduction in time to serve would have been likely to result.

In 1992, an inter-departmental working group recognised the particular difficulties posed in relation to the permanent transfer of long-term prisoners to Northern Ireland because of differing early release provisions, and recommended that consideration be given to amending the legislation to overcome this problem. This recommendation was accepted and has been given effect in the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 (section 41 and schedule 1) brought into force on 1 October 1997.

The new provisions provide for prisoners to be transferred to another jurisdiction on either an unrestricted or a restricted basis. In the case of an unrestricted transfer, the administration of the prisoner's sentence will become a matter entirely for the receiving jurisdiction. A restricted transfer will be subject to conditions whereby the sending jurisdiction will continue to administer certain specified aspects of the sentence.

Transfers will continue to require the consent of the Secretary of State of both the sending and receiving jurisdictions. Normally, transfer requests will be approved only where the prisoner has at least six months left to serve in the receiving jurisdiction before his or her release date at the time of making the request, and where the prisoner has no outstanding appeal against conviction or sentence, is not charged with further criminal proceedings, and is not liable to any further period of imprisonment in lieu of payment of any outstanding monetary orders made by a court.

Each application will be assessed on its individual merits, taking into consideration:

(i) the purpose for which the transfer is requested;

(ii) whether the prisoner was ordinarily resident in the jurisdiction to which transfer is sought prior to the imposition of the current sentence; or whether members of the prisoner's close family are resident in that jurisdiction and there are reasonable grounds for believing that the prisoner will receive regular visits from them; or whether the prisoner has demonstrated through preparations that he has made for his life following release from prison that he intends to reside in the receiving jurisdiction upon release and he is in the later stages of his sentence;

(iii) whether there are grounds for believing that the prisoner may disrupt or attempt to disrupt any prison establishment, or pose an unacceptable risk to security; and

(iv) any compelling or compassionate circumstances.

When considering whether to make an unrestricted or a restricted transfer, the Secretary of State of the sending jurisdiction will take into account the period and terms of transfer requested by the prisoner, and whether, as a consequence of an unrestricted transfer, there would be likely to be any effect on the length of time which the prisoner would be required to serve, or on any post release supervision requirement.

Where an unrestricted transfer is granted, the prisoner will serve the remainder of his or her sentence in the receiving jurisdiction as if that sentence had been passed there, and will be subject for all purposes to the statutory and other provisions applying to prisoners within the receiving jurisdiction.

A prisoner granted a restricted transfer will automatically remain, for the duration of his or her transfer, subject to the law governing release on licence, automatic release, post release supervision and recall applicable in the sending jurisdiction. In addition, any other condition relating to the terms of a prisoner's detention as the Secretary of State of the sending jurisdiction may deem appropriate in any particular case or class of case may be attached to the transfer.

A prisoner transferred on a restricted basis will normally become subject for all purposes, other than those specified in any conditions attached to the transfer, to the statutory and other provisions applying to prisoners in the receiving jurisdiction (including, for example, such matters as categorisation).

In the light of the new arrangements the Government have taken the opportunity to consider how applications for temporary release from prisoners transferred to another jurisdiction on a restricted basis should be handled. In future, decisions on applications for temporary release for compassionate or other purposes submitted by prisoners granted a restricted transfer for the purposes of facilitating family ties will normally become the responsibility of the jurisdiction to which the prisoner is transferred. Prisoners will be able to apply for periods of temporary release under the provisions existing in the receiving jurisdiction. Each such application will be considered by the appropriate authority in the receiving jurisdiction on its own merits and in accordance with the relevant criteria applying in that jurisdiction. Prisoners will normally, therefore, no longer be eligible to apply for temporary release under the provisions applying in the sending jurisdiction.

However, where a restricted transfer is time limited (for example, to enable the prisoner to receive accumulated visits), or for a purpose other than to facilitate family ties (for example, to attend judicial proceedings or to receive medical treatment), and the prisoner is expected to return to the sending jurisdiction, decisions on temporary release will continue to be made by the sending jurisdiction.

The effect of any conditions attached to a transfer will be explained to the prisoner concerned prior to transfer. Any conditions imposed may be reviewed at the request of the prisoner or either of the Secretaries of State party to the transfer at any time during the duration of the transfer, and may be varied or revoked by the making of a further order. A restricted transfer may not be made unrestricted without the consent of the prisoner concerned. Any requests for variation or revocation of conditions will be considered under the normal transfer criteria.

A prisoner granted a restricted transfer may be returned to the sending jurisdiction at any time if this proves necessary, for example, if the purpose for which the transfer was granted is no longer being fulfilled, at the request of the receiving jurisdiction (in the case of disruptive behaviour), or in the interests of the administration of the sentence (such as consideration by the Parole Board or to undergo post release supervision).

Transfer requests submitted by remand prisoners will be considered in accordance with the normal transfer criteria. However, in view of the need to ensure that the prisoner is available to the courts as required, normally such requests will be granted only where there are compelling or compassionate reasons for doing so.

Where a transfer is agreed, the timing of the prisoner's move will be subject to operational and security considerations in the sending and receiving jurisdictions.

"Corpus Juris"

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the document "Corpus Juris" sponsored by the Directorate General (Financial Control) of the European Commission; what Her Majesty's Government's policy is on this document; and if he will place a copy of the document in the Library. [12813]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* We understand that the document in question is a discussion paper with no formal status. We disagree with many of its recommendations which are incompatible with the legal traditions of this country. However, for any of them to have effect, they would need to be proposed formally and agreed unanimously in the Council. I understand that an English translation of the document should be obtainable from the European Commission. I am arranging for copies to be obtained and placed in the Library as requested.

Crime (Sentences) Act 1997

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) of 30 July, *Official Report,* columns *261–62,* what is the linkage between section 20 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 and other early release provisions; and if he will make a statement on his grounds for not implementing section 20; [12727]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 30 July. *Official Report,* columns *261–62,* to the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate how the extended supervision of sexual offenders he proposes in the Crime and Disorder Bill will differ from that provided in the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997. [12742]

Ms Quin: We decided not to implement the release and post-release supervision provisions set out in sections 10–26 of the 1997 Act on the grounds that they were unnecessarily complicated. Our preferred approach is that the courts should be required to spell out in open court what a sentence means in practice, based on the existing release and supervision arrangements provided for by the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

The principle of extended supervision of sex offenders is one which the Government fully support. However, the arrangements for extended supervision of sex offenders in the 1997 Act cannot be brought into effect independently of other provisions in part II of the Act which we believe would create overly complex arrangements. That is why we intend to bring forward fresh provision to do this in the Crime and Disorder Bill. This will give the courts the same powers in respect of maximum post-release supervision as section 20.

SCOTLAND

Sewerage Charges

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will grant relief to domestic customers in respect of sewerage charges in 1998–99. [13374]

Mr. Dewar: Yes. I have set aside £29.7 million for this purpose. This sum represents a saving to average band D households of between £17 and £20 in 1998–99. The sum is in line with the previous Government's expenditure plans. This relief, first introduced in 1996, is a transitional arrangement which is to be phased out by April 1999. We shall pay grant to water authorities to compensate for the charge income they will forgo in 1998–99. Of this some £9.0 million will be available to the East Authority, £7.4 million to the North Authority and £13.2 million to the West Authority. The necessary order will be laid before Parliament shortly.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which her Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work; co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12559]

Mr. Foulkes: My Department has an in-house payment system which processes most payments made in the UK in respect of goods or services supplied under the aid programme. Payments are authorised by the spending departments, which are mainly overseas. After input and review by headquarters staff in the UK these payments are then recorded, checked and cleared for issue by the accounts department in our East Kilbride headquarters. The accounts department's total running costs for 1996–97 were £819,000 but not all these costs related to the processing of payments for goods and services. It would involve disproportionate expense to make a reliable estimate of spending departments' and other headquarters' costs covering only this aspect of work.

In addition, my Department employs five procurement agents: these agents include in their fee a sum to cover payment to suppliers. This fee covers all aspects of procurement agents' services and agents do not separate out that element of their fee which covers payment to suppliers.

Financial aid to partner Governments under the terms of loan or grant agreements is made by Crown Agents Financial Services which charged £589,000 for this service in 1996–97. Some payments are also made overseas by embassies and high commissions on our behalf.

PHARE

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made in respect of the financial irregularities noted by the Court of Auditors in its special report concerning the decentralised system for the implementation of the PHARE programme between 1990 and 1995. [12503]

Mr. Foulkes: We maintain regular contacts with the commission (DG1A) in order to help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of PHARE implementation and financial control procedures. We agree with the findings of the report and will maintain pressure for improvements.

Kenya

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what are the current levels of aid to Kenya; and how much is provided to *(a)* the Government of Kenya and *(b)* non-governmental organisations. [12553]

Mr. Foulkes: British aid to Kenya in 1996–97 was about £25 million, 40 per cent. of which was provided through non-government channels.

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will provide support to human rights monitors in Kenya. [12551]

Mr. Foulkes: My Department has offered to provide finance to assist with an election observing programme by three well-respected non-government organisations in Kenya.

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she next expects to meet representatives of the Kenyan Government to discuss human rights issues. [12550]

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development met President Moi and Finance Minister Mudavadi in Nairobi on 6 October 1997. During these meetings she explained Britain's commitment to the elimination of poverty in poorer countries and our intention to work with those Governments which are themselves committed to taking the full range of measures necessary to achieve this aim including the improvement of human rights. She has no plans to meet representatives of the Kenyan Government.

TREASURY

VAT (Schools)

Dr. Vis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if all state schools are registered for VAT, and what the differences are between VAT treatment for *(a)* local education authority schools, *(b)* grant-maintained schools and *(c)* private educational facilities. [12776]

Dawn Primarolo: Local Education Authority schools are covered by the VAT registration of their parent local authority. Other schools may be registered for VAT in respect of non-education activities. Education itself is exempt from VAT, so no school has to charge VAT on its provision of education.

There are some differences between different types of school in respect of recovery of VAT incurred on their expenditure. Local Education Authority schools can recover all VAT under the special provisions made for local authorities; other schools cannot, though grant-maintained schools are compensated for this by central Government grant, and independent schools can take non-recoverable VAT into account in setting the level of their fees.

Financial Services Regulation

Mr. Stephen Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his proposals for reform of financial services regulation. [13096]

Mr. Darling: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has decided that the new single regulatory organisation is to be called the Financial Services Authority. This name has been adopted by the body formerly known as the Securities and Investments Board.

The draft legislation to be published next summer will include draft statutory objectives for the Financial Services Authority. These are expected to include objectives in the following areas:

the promotion and maintenance of confidence in the UK financial sector and markets;

protecting consumers by ensuring that firms are competent and financially sound and give their customers confidence in their integrity, while recognising customers' own responsibility for their financial decisions;

promoting the improvement of public understanding of the benefits and risks associated with financial products through the improvement of information and advice;

monitoring, detecting and preventing financial crime.

We also intend to set some objectives to condition how the Financial Services Authority goes about its job. We want it to:

be efficient and economic, ensuring that costs and restrictions on firms are proportionate to the benefits of regulation;

facilitate innovation in financial services;

take account of the international nature of financial regulation and financial services business.

The Financial Services Authority has today published a launch document with more details of the preparations for the new regulatory structure. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

The Financial Services Authority has also published today consultation documents on practitioner and consumer involvement and the basis for charging for banking supervision. The details of the new regulatory structure and the Government's intentions for the draft legislation will be subject to further consultation.

Indirect Taxation

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the European Commission proposals to adopt a new procedure concerning the implementing measures relating to indirect taxation, as observed in IP/97/653. [12504]

Dawn Primarolo: In common with most other member states, the UK is committed to the maintenance of unanimity in the Council as the basis for EC decision-making on indirect tax matters. The UK is thus opposed to the European Commission's proposals.

Taxation (Expatriates)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change the arrangements for the taxation of expatriates. [12845]

Dawn Primarolo: All aspects of the UK tax system are kept under regular review.

National Assets Register

Mr. Alan Keen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to be able to publish the National Assets Register. [12581]

Mr. Darling: The Government is currently working towards the completion of the National Asset Register and hopes to publish it in the second half of November 1997.

Economic and Monetary Union

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make it his policy to protect Britain's zero rates of VAT during negotiations on stage III of economic and monetary union; [12841]

(2) what action he will take to ensure that Britain's zero rates of VAT are protected under European Commission plans to harmonise VAT rates. [12842]

Dawn Primarolo: Although the European Commission aspires to the further harmonisation of VAT rates as part of its suggested programme for a "common system" of VAT, there are no current legislative proposals on rates. The UK's zero rates are fully safeguarded under existing EC VAT law, and any change requires the unanimous agreement of member states. We are committed to retaining the right to keep our existing zero rates and there is no question of being forced to give them up.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the real change in total public expenditure for *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99 consequential on the higher gross domestic product deflators announced in the Budget. [12477]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* In the July Budget, the projections for General Government Expenditure were increased in cash terms by £0.4 billion in 1997–98 and by £4.1 billion in 1998–99 compared with the figures published in the November 1996 Budget. An additional £1.2 billion was provided for Health and £1 billion for Education in 1998–99. Forecasts for the GDP deflator were also increased. In 1995–96 prices, the July projections for General Government Expenditure were lower than those in the November 1996 Budget by £2.6 billion in 1997–98 and £1.5 billion in 1998–99.

Single European Currency

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer where Nordic gold for single currency coinage will be mined; which companies will be involved; and if his Department will undertake research on the ecological effects of the mining and refining involved. [12517]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* There are no plans for single currency coinage for circulation to contain gold.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of members of closed pension schemes with no sponsoring employers who will be adversely affected by the Budget changes to the value of tax credits. [12838]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* We have no detailed information concerning the membership of closed pension schemes with no sponsoring employers.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to compensate members of the closed pension schemes with no sponsoring employers whose weekly income has fallen as a result of the Budget changes to the value of tax credits. [12837]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* No.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

BNFL

Mr. McGrady: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the role of her Department in determining dividend guidelines relating to BNFL; when the guidelines were last reviewed; and what factors were taken into account in determining such guidelines. [12938]

Mr. Battle: Dividend policy is reviewed from time to time by my Department, in consultation with the Treasury, the most recent being in 1995, when the basis of calculating the dividend was changed from a current cost accounting basis to a historic profit after tax basis. A number of factors are taken into account in determining dividend policy, including the need for the Government, as shareholder, to earn a reasonable rate of return on its investment.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what contact has taken place between officials of her Department and representatives of BNFL since 1 May. [12950]

Mr. Battle: The Department maintains regular contact with BNFL on a wide range of issues.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when her Department last approved BNFL's corporate plan; what period it covered; and if it indicated that mixed oxide fuel is to be manufactured by BNFL at Sellafield. [12942]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: BNFL's 1996 Corporate Plan was approved in November 1996. It covered the period from April 1996 to March 2000. The Plan, and the Company's 1996 Annual Report and Accounts, indicated that Mixed Oxide (MOX) fuel continues to be manufactured at Sellafield.

DTI Recruitment

Mr. Dismore: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will publish summary information on DTI recruitment for calendar year 1996, and the use of permitted exceptions to the principles of fair and open competition and selection on merit, as required by the civil service commissioners' recruitment code. [13302]

Mr. Ian McCartney: It is DTI policy that recruitment is carried out on the basis of fair and open competition and selection on merit, subject to the exceptions permitted by the Civil Service Commissioners. My Department has systems in place which ensure that the principles of fair and open competition are understood and followed, in accordance with the provisions of the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code. These systems are subject to internal check by The DTI's Internal Audit.

The DTI's Executive Agencies and the Government Office network make separate arrangements for publishing recruitment data, and the following table and narratives describe only Headquarters recruitment.

Grade	*Permanent*	*FTA*	*Casual*	*Standby*	*Secondment*	*Gender* *Male*	*Female*
Grade 6	0	2	0	0	2	4	[2]0
Grade 7	1	8	0	4	51	57	7
SEO/SSO/SPTO[1]	1	2	0	0	2	4	[2]1
Higher Executive Officer	2	0	0	0	3	3	[2]2
Executive Officer	1	4	1	0	0	2	4
Administrative Officer	13	5	143	0	0	56	105
Administrative Assistant	2	1	49	0	0	19	33
Insolvency Examiner G	0	0	0	0	2	2	[2]0
Investigations Officer	6	4	0	0	0	10	0
Administrative Trainee	7	0	0	0	0	5	2
Higher Executive Officer D	6	0	0	0	0	4	2
Higher Scientific Officer D	3	0	0	0	0	1	[2]2
Lawyers	11	0	0	0	1	4	8
Legal Trainees	2	0	0	0	0	1	[2]1
Senior Research Officer	2	0	0	0	0	1	[2]1
Assistant Economist	6	0	0	0	1	4	3
Assistant Statistician	1	0	2	0	0	3	[2]0
Typist	0	0	13	0	0	0	13

[1] Senior Executive Officer/Senior Scientific Officer/Senior Professional and Technical Officer.

[2] Note that ethnic data has been suppressed for those grades where numbers recruited are five or less, to avoid the possibility of identifying individuals.

The number of occasions on which the permitted exceptions to fair and open competition and selection on merit have been used at each level (except for appointments of up to 12 months) are categorised as follows:

extensions of appointments of up to 12 months up to a maximum of 24 months:

two Administrative Assistants where permanent post holders were on temporary promotion into the next grade which was subject to advertising

one Administrative Officer where the future of the post was subject to review

recurrent short term appointments:—none

short term appointments where highly specialised skills are required:—none

extensions of short term appointments beyond the initially publicised period, including conversions to permanency:

one Assistant Statistician appointment extended to 18 months where a replacement with statistical experience could not be identified

secondments:—none

extensions to secondments:—none

re-appointment of former civil servants:

one at Grade 6

six at Grade 7

four at Executive Officer

two at Administrative Officer

two at Investigations Officer

transfers of staff with their work (not under TUPE):—none

transfers of staff from other public services without work (unless from a public body staffed exclusively by civil servants):—none

appointments of surplus acceptable candidates to shortage posts:—none

appointments of disabled candidates under modified selection arrangements

any use of the exceptions reserved for the Commissioners:—none.

Company Auditors

Mr. Todd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she has received the fifth annual reports of the recognised supervisory bodies for company auditors under part II of the Companies Act 1989. [13303]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I have received the fifth annual reports of all the recognised supervisory bodies for company auditors, and have placed copies in the Library. My Department will be discussing the contents of the reports with the bodies as necessary.

Lloyd's of London

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what evidence concerning the operations of Lloyd's of London in 1982 has been passed by her Department to the Serious Fraud Office since the end of June 1997. [12976]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* My officials received a number of papers relating to Lloyd's which were passed to the Serious Fraud Office for their consideration.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what costs have been incurred to date by the United Kingdom Government as amicus curiae in cases involving Lloyd's of London in the United States courts. [12975]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The costs of individual activities undertaken by the Government in pursuit of its regulatory responsibilities in respect of Lloyd's of London cannot be separately identified, and the resources devoted to producing them would be disproportionate.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judicial Appointments

Ms Fiona Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what changes his Department proposes to make to the current system of judicial appointments. [13296]

Mr. Hoon: It is essential in the public interest that the judiciary at every level is of the highest possible quality. Appointments will continue to be made strictly on merit, after the independent views of the judiciary and the legal profession have been taken into consideration by the Lord Chancellor; and appointment to full time office normally made only after satisfactory service in a part time judging.

Nevertheless, improvements can be made. I intend to present an annual report to Parliament on the operation of the judicial appointments system. The first report will cover the period 1998–99. I also intend to end the system of appointment to the High Court bench only by invitation and to invite applications for appointments to the High Court bench, so that all with judicial ambitions can be assured that their cases are properly considered.

I propose to ensure appropriate flexibility in part-time sittings arrangements where, for example, women or men have taken career breaks for family reasons. My officials are developing plans to ensure that those who sit part-time may be able to concentrate their sittings into a shorter period of time than at present. By this means these career breaks will not, so far as practicable, impede career development.

I intend to increase the upper age limit for appointment as Assistant Recorder from 50 to 53 in future competition rounds. Raising the age limit to 53 will widen the pool of potential applicants. The normal period of service as an Assistant Recorder and Recorder, before appointment to the Circuit bench, is five to seven years and an appointment to the Circuit bench at or around 60 would enable the judge to serve for a minimum of 10 years before retiring at 70.

In the longer term I intend to review whether an Ombudsman should be appointed with power to examine fully complaints from anyone who feels unfairly treated by the appointments process; and to review the appointment procedures for deputy High Court judge appointments. I have recently appointed two solicitors, direct from the profession, to act as deputy High Court judges. This has not happened before. I also intend to review the scope to improve arrangements for appraisal of performance of the part-time judiciary, not least to improve the assessments of their performance which contribute to my decisions on applications for full-time office.

Since becoming Lord Chancellor I have decided to involve in the process of shortlisting judicial candidates for interviews both judges and lay members who will have, in advance, a summary of the views expressed in consultation about every applicant. An additional 28 lay members have been appointed to assist in the shortlisting and interviewing of candidates for a range of judicial appointments including those of Circuit judge, District judge and Assistant Recorder. I have taken steps to promote work on equal opportunities, in conjunction with the legal profession, which I will announce shortly. I have required that any allegation of misconduct made in the course of consultation about a judicial candidate must be specific and subject to disclosure to the candidate.

So far as the magistracy is concerned, I have increased for the first time the upper age limit for appointment as a lay magistrate to 65, so as to draw from the pool of the age group 55 to 65 to achieve a better social and political balance on the bench. This age group includes many who may have taken early retirement. I have also opened the magistracy to blind candidates on an experimental basis.

I believe that these positive measures will strengthen the openness, flexibility and effectiveness of the arrangements for judicial appointments. I do not rule out further measures in due course. I earlier announced (23 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *145*), that I proposed to consult on the merits of establishing a Judicial Appointments Commission. However, in the light of the measures that I have listed above, the resources of my Department, and the other substantial priorities facing my Department, including a very heavy workload connected with legal aid and civil justice reforms, I have decided not to proceed with further work on a possible Commission, but to concentrate on making those changes I regard as most urgent.

Mental Incapacity Report

Mr. Hope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action his Department proposes to take in respect of the Law Commission's report on mental incapacity. [13097]

Mr. Hoon: The Law Commission's Report on Mental Incapacity is a thorough and detailed examination of the current law. It provides a coherent framework for reform. The Government recognises, however, that the Report addresses sensitive issues on which strong personal views may be held.

The Government does not consider that it would be appropriate to legislate in this area without fresh public consultation. It therefore hopes to issue a Consultation Paper by the end of the year seeking views on the full range of the Law Commission's recommendations.

The Law Commission's Report does not make any recommendations concerning euthanasia. The Government is of the certain view, in line with the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics, that euthanasia cannot be sanctioned in any circumstances. The Consultation Paper will therefore not seek views on this subject.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Nectarines

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons the EU Commission has placed restrictions on the size of nectarines which may be sold. [12337]

Mr. Rooker: The EU Marketing Standard for nectarines has been in place since 1990.

There is substantial over-production of nectarines, brought about largely by the Intervention (withdrawal) system. The Commission has sought to tackle this to some extent by limiting the size of the fruit that can be marketed and thus intervened (withdrawn), thereby limiting the cost to EU taxpayers. Although the EU regime for fresh fruit and vegetables has only recently been reformed, with significant reductions in the amount of produce that may be withdrawn, ultimately we would prefer to see an end to the withdrawal system.

The establishment of minimum sizes helps to ensure that only nectarines which are sufficiently developed, and able to ripen, are available to the consumer.

Agriculture Councils

Ms Shipley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Councils held on 22 and 23 September in Brussels and on 20 and 21 October in Luxembourg; and if he will make a statement. [13295]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I represented the United Kingdom at meetings of the European Union Agriculture Council on 22–23 September and 20–21 October. I was accompanied at the October Council by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, Lord Sewel.

At the September Council, EU Agriculture Ministers followed up their informal discussions of early September on the Commission's proposals to reform the common agricultural policy which have been made as part of Agenda 2000. On this occasion, discussion focused in particular on rural development, environmental and structural policy. Member states reaffirmed the importance of an active rural development policy to assist the transformation of European agriculture; there were, however, differences of view in the Council on the funding of rural and structural measures in the future. I stressed the importance to the United Kingdom of setting the proposals on rural development clearly in the context of changes to the market mechanisms of the CAP, on which the Commission's Agenda 2000 proposals represented an important first step. I also emphasised the need to foster alternative rural enterprises as the source of new employment possibilities in the countryside in the future.

The Council of Ministers also heard reports from the Commission on progress in negotiations on veterinary and plant health equivalence agreements with third countries; and noted the Commission's intention to lodge an appeal in the WTO dispute concerning hormones in beef. In a brief discussion of BSE, I reported to the Council the steps I have taken in the United Kingdom, both legislative and administrative, to tighten up our measures to counter illegal exports of beef and beef products from the UK. These were welcomed in the Council.

I pressed the Commissioner and the Presidency to provide an early opportunity for the Council to discuss the present state of the beef market, on the basis of the Commission's promised report, to decide whether the short term market adjustment schemes agreed in 1996 were working effectively.

I also raised in the Council the UK's serious concerns about the impact of the recent WTO Appellate body ruling on the EU bananas regime in so far as its affects access by ACP Caribbean banana producers to EU markets. I urged the Commission to reach a rapid and equitable solution to the problems flowing from the WTO ruling which would not only respect WTO obligations but allow the EU to meet its commitments to the ACP and in particular on Caribbean trading partners under the Lomé Agreement.

At the October Agriculture Council, discussion concentrated on the market reform proposals contained in Agenda 2000. I argued for the removal of production controls in the form of quotas and compulsory set aside and for a lowering of support levels to bring EU prices closer to world market prices and I argued that transitional arrangements should begin soon. The Council will resume its discussion on this crucial issue in November. A letter from the President of the Agriculture Council to the President of the European Council on employment policy in rural areas was approved by Ministers.

In a debate on the Commission's report on the beef and veal markets, I expressed doubts about the efficacy of the early marketing scheme for veal in reducing production on the EU market, and urged the Commission to make a further cut in the premium paid under the calf processing scheme. The Council reached political agreement upon changes to the system of support for producers of durum wheat. Under the compromise which was agreed by qualified majority (Greece, Sweden and Denmark opposing), the additional aid paid for durum wheat in traditional producing areas was reduced, and the maximum area eligible for aid in each member state determined. Five thousand hectares will be eligible in the United Kingdom.

The Council discussed the Commission's green paper on the general principles of food law in the EU, in which I emphasised the UK Government's commitment to attaining very high levels of food safety. The Council also took note of Commission reports on genetic resources, BSE, and the state of play on veterinary and plant health negotiations with their countries.

Cattle Slaughter Scheme

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average weight of cattle slaughtered under the over-30-months cattle slaughter scheme; and what proportion of the cattle slaughtered under the scheme exceeded that average weight. [10159]

Mr. Rooker *[pursuant to his answer, 31 July 1997, c. 433]:* The average weight of cattle slaughtered under the OTMS is as follows:

	Average weight (kgs)	*Percentage exceeding average weight*
Cows	600	47
Bulls	802	47
Heifers	549	49
Steers	632	49
All animals	604	47

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle weighing *(a)* between 560 and 609 kg, *(b)* between 610 and 659 kg, *(c)* between 660 and 709 kg, *(d)* between 710 and 759 kg and *(e)* over 760 kg live weight have been slaughtered under the over-30-months cattle slaughter scheme during 1997. [10160]

Mr. Rooker *[pursuant to his answer, 31 July 1997, c. 433]:* The information requested is as follows:

	560–609 kg	*610–659 kg*	*660–709 kg*	*710–759 kg*	*Over 760 kg*	*Totals*
Liveweight						
Cows	27,250	21,351	12,010	5,230	2,582	68,423
Other	2,700	1,960	1,138	702	1,448	7,948
Deadweight						
Cows	24,889	22,886	18,531	13,149	16,643	96,098
Other	2,328	1,863	1,402	1,042	3,952	10,587
Totals	57,167	48,060	33,081	20,123	24,625	183,056

International Whaling Commission

Ms Shipley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the outcome was of the annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission held on 20 to 24 October in Monaco; and if he will make a statement. [13294]

Mr. Morley: The International Whaling Commission's 49th annual meeting was held in Monaco from 20 to 24 October. The United Kingdom delegation was composed of officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, assisted by officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and representatives of environmental organisations and veterinary experts. I attended the first day of the conference and took the opportunity to meet with representatives of the environmental organisations and the chairman of the IWC.

At this meeting we made clear the United Kingdom's continued opposition to commercial whaling. We stressed that the UK does not believe that there is any justification for any whaling to take place, other than some subsistence whaling by indigenous peoples, and would like to see all other forms of whaling ended. We believe whaling does not serve any genuine need and involves unacceptable cruelty. We also emphasised our continuing support for the current moratorium on commercial whaling. I am pleased to say that a request by Japan for a quota of 50 minke whales, which we and many others considered would have breached the moratorium, was again defeated.

Before the meeting, Ireland had indicated that it intended to put forward a number of ideas for consideration. At the meeting Ireland explained that it was concerned that the inability of the IWC to reach agreement on fundamental issues relating to whale conservation made progress on this impossible and might lead to the break-up of the IWC. It wished, therefore, to explore whether there was any scope to reach an agreement between those opposed to and those in favour of whaling.

With this objective, Ireland suggested:

the revised management scheme (RMS) should be completed and adopted; the RMS, which is currently being developed by the IWC, is intended to ensure that any future whaling takes place only on a sustainable basis and under the full control of the IWC;

any quotas granted under the RMS should be restricted to coastal areas of nations that are currently whaling, creating a de facto ocean sanctuary;

any quotas should be for local consumption only, to prevent the development of international trade in whalemeat;

so called "scientific whaling" should be phased out over a period;

regulations for whalewatching should be prepared to minimise disturbance to whale populations.

There was a preliminary discussion of these ideas. The UK made it clear that, while we were ready to explore all ways of improving whale conservation, we would only support measures which we were convinced would contribute positively to this objective. We wished to see the current moratorium on commercial whaling made permanent, which we believed would be the most effective way of creating a global whale sanctuary, and we strongly supported ending scientific whaling. On the other hand, we had serious reservations about the Irish ideas on coastal whaling, and could not accept any definition of coastal whaling which allowed it to take place up to 200 miles from the coast.

While there was a good deal of support for Ireland's wish to break the current deadlock, a number of other delegations expressed reservations about particular aspects of the proposals. The Irish Commissioner, who was elected IWC chairman at the end of the meeting, will now consider how best to carry matters forward before the next IWC meeting in Oman in May 1998. The UK delegation remains to be convinced that aspects of the Irish proposal will assist whale conservation.

At recent IWC meetings the UK has, with New Zealand, been pressing Japan to end the use of the electric lance, a device used to kill whales wounded but not killed by an explosive harpoon. We believe that there is conclusive evidence that use of the electric lance is inhumane. At this year's meeting we again raised this issue, and I am pleased to say that Japan has undertaken to end use of the electric lance, except in exceptional circumstances, from the start of the next whaling season. I believe that this is a significant success and demonstrates what can be achieved by persistence linked to sound science.

As in previous years the UK delegation made clear our opposition to the whaling activities of Norway and Japan. We supported a resolution calling on Norway to reconsider its objection to the moratorium and to halt all commercial whaling operations. We also supported two resolutions strongly criticising Japan's scientific whaling programme and calling on Japan to end scientific whaling.

The IWC agreed a number of new aboriginal subsistence whaling quotas. These included a quota for grey whales, for which the United States have been seeking a small quota for use by the Makah Indians. Since the IWC sets quotas for particular stocks of whales, the quota ultimately agreed also took account of a bid by Russia for a quota for use by the indigenous people of the Chukotka peninsular in Siberia. In discussion the UK pressed for a reduction in the level of quota sought; we also argued that the Makah, who have not whaled for over 70 years, have not established a valid claim for an aboriginal quota. I am pleased to say that the quota finally agreed is significantly lower than was originally proposed; in agreeing it the UK made it clear that our agreement did not imply that we accepted the validity of the case made on behalf of the Makah.

New quotas were also agreed for bowhead whales and for whales hunted by aboriginal subsistence whalers in Greenland.

During these discussions the UK expressed concern about the humaneness of aboriginal subsistence whaling. In the light of these concerns we proposed a resolution which, while welcoming the steps taken so far to reduce the pain and distress caused to whales by these hunts, called for further improvements. The resolution, which was adopted by consensus, also ensures that this issue will be revisited annually by the IWC.

A number of other issues were discussed during the meeting. The UK promoted a resolution on small cetaceans calling on all member countries to take appropriate steps to reduce by catches and directed takes and to encourage further scientific research. We also supported a resolution endorsing the work of the Scientific Committee on threats posed to cetaceans by climate change and pollution and encouraging further research.

DEFENCE

Naval Bases and Supply Agency

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Naval Bases and Supply Agency for 1997–98. [13094]

Dr. Reid: The chief executive of the Naval Bases and Supply Agency has been set the following key targets:

1. To complete 92 per cent. of assisted maintenance periods for vessels to time, budget and standard.

2. To supply 92 per cent. of available material to rectify operational defects on vessels within required delivery dates.

3. To establish the NBSA cost per materially available vessel day by establishing a baseline for the unit cost of vessel repair and maintenance, and then setting targets for reducing this cost.

4. To complete integration of the Portsmouth naval base and director supply (south) management structures, and to consolidate the corporate management structure of the agency by reviewing opportunities for rationalisation of the HQ structure.

5. To establish the agency account via the CAPITAL Project, including the provision of an executive information system to meet business requirements, by March 2000. Progress report in March 1998.

6. To achieve year-on-year efficiency improvements of 2.3 per cent.

7. To achieve full accreditation of Investors in People by phased implementation by 2000. Progress report in March 1998.

Territorial Army and Volunteer Reserves

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost per year to his Department of each member of *(a)* the Territorial Army and *(b)* the volunteer reserves. [13092]

Dr. Reid: The information requested is set out in the table rounded to the nearest £100. The figures are calculated from the overall cost of the reserve force concerned for the financial year 1996–97 and its average membership for that year. They exclude provision for items whose costs cannot be identified separately from those incurred for the regular services.

	£
Territorial Army	6,100
Royal Naval Reserve	6,700
Royal Marines Reserve	7,300
Royal Auxiliary Air Force[1]	7,400

[1] Figures relate to those personnel who could be called out to perform an operational role: they do not include RAF volunteer reserve (civilian component), RAF volunteer reserve (training) or RAF volunteer reserve (university air squadrons).

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what is the current cost of the reserve forces, by type. [11023]

Dr. Reid *[pursuant to his reply, 29 July 1997, c. 183]:* I regret that my previous answer was incorrect because further information has been brought to light. The revised information for financial year 1996–97 is in the table. These figures exclude provision for those items whose costs cannot be identified separately from those incurred for the regular forces.

	£ million
Royal Fleet Reserve	0.04
Royal Naval Reserve	17.5
Royal Marines Reserve	6.6
Territorial Army Commando Units	1.8
Army Reserve	0.6
Territorial Army	341.3
Royal Air Force Reserve	0.4
Royal Auxiliary Air Force	9.5

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money is allocated to maintaining the Territorial Army in the current financial year; what is this sum as a percentage of the defence budget; and what the allocation will be in *(a)* cash and *(b)* as a percentage of the defence budget in the next three financial years. [8183]

Dr. Reid *[pursuant to his reply, 16 July 1997, c. 234]:* I regret that my previous answer was incorrect because further information on the costs of the Territorial Army has been brought to light. When this additional expenditure is taken into account it shows that the overall cost of the Territorial Army for financial year 1997–98 now stands at some £340.4 million (not £334 million) which still represents about 1.6 per cent. of the defence budget. This figure excludes provision for those items whose costs cannot be identified separately from those incurred for the regular Army.

The allocation of funds for the Territorial Army in the next three financial years will be determined as part of the MOD's long term costing, which is the process by which the Department recosts and adjusts its internal plans. The Department's internal plans represent projections and assumptions, which inform advice to Ministers on the affordability of particular elements of the defence programme, and it has been the policy of successive Governments not to publish detailed information arising from this. Accordingly, I am withholding the information requested in the second part of the question which constitutes internal discussion and advice, under exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Army Equipment Support

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future management of the Army's equipment support. [13093]

Dr. Reid: I have instigated a formal review of the Army's Equipment Support in order to determine whether agency status or other options for equipment support, including privatisation, contractorisation or partnering arrangements with Industry would best meet the Army's requirements.

Comments and contributions from those with an interest in the equipment support services provided by the Director General Equipment Support (Army) on behalf of the Quartermaster General Army will be welcomed and should be sent by 7 November to:

Major General P. V. R. Besgrove CBE
Director General Equipment Support (Army)
HQ QMG
Monxton Road
Andover
Hants SP11 8HT.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received the report of the inspection of the Ministry of Defence Police by Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary; and if he will make a statement. [13095]

Dr. Reid: My right hon. Friend has received the report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary on the Ministry of Defence Police. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library of the House.

HEALTH

Nurse Recruitment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses in England and Wales were recruited from *(a)* the Irish Republic and *(b)* Northern Ireland in each of the past five years. [12608]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not collected centrally. I refer my hon. Friend to the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for statistics about nurses registered to practice in England and Wales.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Quota Hopping

16. **Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons the agreement reached on quota hopping was not included in the Amsterdam treaty. [12129]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 18 June, *Official Report*, columns 331–44, at Amsterdam. Not a single member state was willing to support the protocol to the treaty proposed by the previous Administration.

EU Enlargement

18. **Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what practical measures will be taken to ensue that new countries are helped to join the European Community. [12131]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The European Commission has proposed reinforcing the pre-accession strategy for Central European applicants to the European Union. This should lead to better targeted financial and technical assistance to help the applicants prepare for EU membership. The European Council will adopt a position on these proposals at Luxembourg in December.

30. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the expansion of the European Union. [12145]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer that I gave today to the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall).

Kashmir

19. **Mrs. Brinton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards Kashmir. [12132]

22. **Mr. Hopkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards Kashmir. [12135]

Mr. Fatchett: We are deeply concerned by the continuing conflict in Kashmir and support the search for a just and lasting solution. We condemn the acts of terrorism and the abuses of human rights which bring suffering to the population. We call for an end to all external support for violence in Kashmir. We welcome the dialogue between India and Pakistan and urge them to pursue meaningful talks on Kashmir and the other issues that divide them.

EU Common Foreign and Security Policy

20. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what he expects will be Britain's *(a)* gross and *(b)* net contribution to the European Union's budget for common foreign and security policy matters for the year 1998–99. [12133]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The EC Preliminary Draft Budget (PDB) for calendar year 1998 makes provision for commitments of up to 30 Mecu (i.e. about £22.1 million) for CFSP actions. Britain's gross contribution is approximately 15 per cent. of the total budget, i.e. up to £3.32 million depending on the prevailing exchange rate. Britain does not benefit directly from CFSP expenditure.

European Court of Justice

21. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the areas in which the European Court of Justice has gained jurisdiction under the terms of the Amsterdam treaty. [12134]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We believe that if the European Union is to work properly, the Court of Justice must have strong, if carefully circumscribed, powers. The new Treaty involves a limited extension of ECJ jurisdiction in a way which respects this balance.

Bosnia

23. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the peace process in Bosnia. [12136]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer that I gave today to the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire, (Mr. Barnes).

Middle East Peace Process

25. **Mr. Casale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his assessment of progress in the middle east peace process. [12139]

26. **Mr. Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the middle east peace process. [12141]

33. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received regarding the middle east peace process. [12148]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer hon. Members to the oral answer that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden).

Cyprus

27. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives he has put forward to try to solve the impasse over the re-unification of Cyprus. [12142]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We intend to remain active and creative in support of the UN Secretary-General's mission of good offices on Cyprus.

Indonesia

28. **Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on human rights in Indonesia. [12143]

Mr. Fatchett: We remain concerned about the human rights situation in both Indonesia and East Timor. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the situation during his visit to Indonesia in August.

EU Budget

29. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to reduce incidents of fraud in relation to the EU budget. [12144]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We are committed to reducing fraud against the EU budget. Tackling fraud and financial mismanagement will be a priority for our Presidency next year and we will be announcing a package of measures which we intend to take forward.

Taiwan

31. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Taiwan. [12146]

Mr. Fatchett: While we have no diplomatic relations with Taiwan, we value our commercial and cultural ties. We welcome expanding trade links, the growing number of Taiwanese students and tourists who visit, and increasing Taiwanese inward investment in the United Kingdom.

UN Reform

32. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the UN reform package. [12147]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear at the UN General Assembly last month our strong support for the Secretary-General's reform package. It will give the UN the flexibility, competence and efficiency it needs for the next century. We are now working for its early endorsement.

EU Institutions (Communication)

34. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to improve communications between national parliamentarians and EU institutions. [12149]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We support closer contacts between national parliamentarians, in line with its commitment to enhance the role of national parliaments in the EU. The development of such contacts is principally a matter for national parliaments to pursue. I understand that the House authorities are considering the question of representation at the European Parliament and/or in Brussels for the House of Commons.

Cuba

35. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the Cuban Government on relations with the European Union and the United Nations. [12150]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met the Cuban Ambassador at the Diplomatic Reception in June and the Ambassador called on my noble Friend Baroness Symons, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, on 26 June. Officials frequently discuss with the Cuban Government their relations with the European Union and the United Nations.

We and EU partners share the goal of a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba. We favour constructive engagement, not isolation. The EU adopted a Common Position on Cuba on 2 December 1996, reaffirming the EU's commitment to constructive engagement and to promoting political, economic and human rights reform in Cuba. This was presented to the Cuban Government on 21 July and we look forward to furthering this dialogue.

Strategic Defence Review

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made on international controls on weapons proliferation to the strategic defence review. [12114]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have worked closely with the Ministry of Defence on all aspects of the Strategic Defence Review. We remain committed to maintaining and, where necessary, strengthening international controls on weapons proliferation. We are working in the relevant international fora to this end.

Kenya

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support the United Kingdom Government are offering to the Kenyan election process. [12335]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Provided we are satisfied that there is the prospect of free and fair elections in Kenya, we will seek to contribute to international and local monitoring of them. Our exact plans have yet to be finalised.

We welcome reforms which will be relevant to electoral conditions agreed by the Inter-Parties Parliamentary Group in Nairobi and President Moi's acceptance of them. We look to all concerned to observe both the letter and the spirit of the reforms in the conduct of the elections themselves.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the Kenyan Government. [12336]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have made clear to the Government of Kenya our views on the conditions that need to be established to ensure that the forthcoming Presidential and legislative elections are free and fair. We have welcomed reforms agreed by the Inter-Parties Parliamentary Group in Nairobi and President Moi's acceptance of them. We have urged that the necessary legislative and other measures be taken quickly to allow sufficient time for full implementation before the elections. We look to all concerned to observe both the letter and the spirit of the reforms in the conduct of the elections themselves. We have also made clear our concerns about human rights in Kenya, and about the economic issues which led the IMF to allow Kenya's Enhanced Statement Adjustment Facility to lapse.

NORTHERN IRELAND

School Enrolments

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the enrolment at *(a)* Brooklands primary school, Dundonald, and *(b)* Dundonald primary school at the beginning of the academic year 1997–98; how many pupils applied for places for that year; and how many applications were refused. [12772]

Mr. Worthington: The enrolment numbers at the beginning of the academic year 1997–98 for Brooklands primary school and Dundonald primary school were:

Brooklands Primary School: 602

Dundonald Primary School: 588

There were 104 applications for Brooklands primary school of which one was refused. There were 84 applications for Dundonald primary school and no refusals.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the enrolment at *(a)* Movilla high school, Newtonards, *(b)* Regent House grammar school and *(c)* Glastry high school at the beginning of the academic year 1997–98; how many pupils applied for places for that year and how many applications were refused; and if she will make a statement about the future provision of places at *(a)* to *(c)*. [12773]

Mr. Worthington: The information requested is set out in the table.

1997–98 school year

	Number of applications received	*Number of applications refused*	*Actual enrolment*
Movilla High School	199	21	888
Regent House School	270	59	1,422
Glastry College	102	none	583

Movilla high school has been refurbished and extended to cater for an enrolment of 900 pupils. A capital scheme is planned to increase the size of Regent House grammar school to cater for 1,470 pupils. Glastry high school has the capacity to cater for 697 pupils.

Lanark Way, Belfast

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to provide a school at Lanark way, Belfast. [12893]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The need for a new replacement primary school for pupils in the St. Paul's parish of West Belfast has been under consideration for some time. A number of possible options for the location of the school are being examined. These include a site adjacent to Lanark way-Springfield road, Belfast. However, no decisions have been taken. The outcome will be informed by consultations with relevant interests and the conclusions of an economic appraisal to determine the most cost-effective method of meeting the educational needs of the pupils in the area.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has for development at Lanark way, Belfast. [12894]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) recently agreed the sale of three sites at Lanark way for commercial/industrial use. The Department plans in the near future to place on the open market a further area of 1.6 hectares for development purposes.

Central Services Agency

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which directorates have achieved benchmarking in the Central Services Agency. [12890]

Mr. Worthington: The information requested is as follows:

Regional Supplies

Medical and Ophthalmic Directorate

Finance and Administration Directorate

Human Resources Directorate

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff, broken down by their perceived religion, were employed in the Central Services Agency, Adelaide street, Belfast, in each of the last two years. [12888]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* Based on the agency's fair employment monitoring returns for 1995 and 1996, the information is as follows:

	1995	*1996*
Male Protestant	102	88
Male Roman Catholic	83	72
Male not known	11	7
Female Protestant	183	167
Female Roman Catholic	147	141
Female not known	10	7

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many directors there are in the Central Services Agency, Adelaide street; and what is their perceived religion. [12891]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* Of the agency's eight directors, four are perceived Protestant, three are perceived Roman Catholic and for the eighth the information is not known—the person is on secondment from the Department of Health and Social Services.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the schools sending pupils for work experience to the Central Services Agency, Adelaide street, Belfast. [12889]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The information is as follows:

St. Genevieve's comprehensive school

St. Louise's comprehensive school

Belfast institute of further and higher education

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many senior officers in the Central Services Agency are perceived to be Protestant though claim to be non-Christian. [12892]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The agency does not know how many senior offices are perceived to be Protestant though claim to be non-Christian—this information is not collated.

Grammar Schools, Belfast

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many primary school pupils transferred to Belfast grammar schools in 1997 from the Bangor and Ards area. [12752]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* One hundred and eighty children transferred from primary schools in the North Down and Ards borough council areas to grammar schools in Belfast this year.

Prison Service

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to chapter 8 of the Prison Service annual report, what were the actual reductions in the cost of running the service in 1995–96. [12966]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* In 1995–96 there was a reduction in the total cost of the Northern Ireland Prison Service of £700,000 over the previous year. The equivalent figure for 1996–97 was £100,000 higher.

The reduction referred to in chapter 8 of the annual report for 1996–97 was primarily due to a recategorisation of part of the expenditure within the total cost, as well as a smaller sum reflecting lower staff-related costs consequent on the closure of Belfast prison.

Decommissioning Commission

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what public funding has been provided for the arms commission established in Northern Ireland; what are the salaries of those appointed to the commission; and what is the current annual budget for the arms commission. [12785]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* No annual budget has yet been determined for the independent international commission on decommissioning which was established on 24 September. However, in the UK capital and running costs, including salaries, are estimated to be some £1,200,000 until the end of May 1998. Most of the running costs will be shared equally with the Government of the Republic of Ireland who have provided the commission with an office in Dublin.

Training and Employment Agency

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the students selected for the Training and Employment Agency sponsored programme in the United States of America are from Northern Ireland, broken down by religious denomination. [12771]

Mr. Worthington: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 22 October 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training & Employment Agency (T&EA), to reply to your question about the number of students from Northern Ireland, by religious denomination, who are on T&EA sponsored programmes in the United States of America (USA).

The T&EA operates 4 USA programmes through its Business Support Division and 1 through its Training Division. The breakdown of these programmes, which are aimed at enhancing the skills and competences of young people, is as follows:

	Number
Business support division programmes	
Catholics	80
Protestants	51
Not stated	20
Total	151
Training division programmes	
Catholics	10
Protestants	14
Total	24

I hope you find this information helpful.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Trees

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the impact of non-indigenous trees on native species forming climax woodland; and what account of detrimental impact on native species is taken when considering tree preservation orders. [12496]

Angela Eagle: The Department has not commissioned any research directly, but the impact of non-native species on semi-natural vegetation is an active area of research by universities and others, including the statutory conservation agencies. Examples include work recently commissioned by English Nature on the recovery of ground flora of ancient broadleaved woodland following conifer removal, and work at the Oxford Forestry Institute on the interaction of sycamore and ash.

Tree preservation orders are made by local planning authorities to protect selected trees and woodlands in the interests of amenity. In deciding whether or not to make orders in respect of non-native trees, authorities are not required to consider the likely impact on native species.

Director of Transport Security Report

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he has published the 1996–97 annual report of the Director of Transport Security. [13298]

Mr. Prescott: Copies are available in the House Libraries.

Sustainable Development Unit

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has, on what time scale, to set up a sustainable development unit within his Department. [12710]

Angela Eagle: The Government's sustainable development unit was set up on 7 July 1997 in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. It reports to the Deputy Prime Minister and has a Government-wide remit to promote sustainable development.

Its main tasks in the new parliamentary Session are to lead a review of the UK sustainable development strategy, with extensive public consultation, and to take forward the "greening Government" initiative in conjunction with a strengthened system of Green Ministers.

Additional information on Greening Government and Green Ministers can be found in the reply by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment to my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) on 31 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *542*.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the real level of average household bills for water and sewerage in Great Britain as a whole and for each region of Great Britain in each year since 1978. [12831]

Angela Eagle: No figures are available for the average unmeasured household bill for water and sewerage in Great Britain as a whole. No fully valid comparison is possible between water services bills in England and Wales and in Scotland, where the administrative and funding arrangements for water services have been and are quite different.

I am advised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland that in Scotland the real levels of average water and sewerage charges for the years 1989–90 to 1996–97 are as given in the following list. Information is not yet available for the current year, or for the period prior to 1989–90.

Scotland: real levels of average water and sewerage charges to households (at 1997–98 prices)

1989–90: £90.21
1990–91: £89.68
1991–92: £100.40
1992–93: £106.14
1993–94: £106.21
1994–95: £109.57
1995–96: £112.91
1996–97: £120.75

In England and Wales the real levels of average unmeasured household water and sewerage charges for the years 1978–79 to 1997–98 are as given in the following table.

England and Wales: real levels of average unmeasured water and sewerage charges to households (at 1997–98 prices)

(£)

	1978–79	*1979–80*	*1980–81*	*1981–82*	*1982–83*	*1983–84*	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*
Anglian	145.92	146.40	160.94	166.30	163.52	163.46	166.85	179.33	187.22	192.24
Dŵr Cymru	142.97	147.15	154.22	147.87	160.91	160.76	164.73	175.82	182.92	190.04
Northumbrian	113.77	105.23	111.49	111.30	114.84	121.67	137.14	139.48	135.32	137.37
North West	112.21	113.63	119.53	121.18	118.42	117.59	121.19	131.25	136.68	141.23
Severn Trent	116.52	121.45	125.13	125.76	123.52	120.32	120.54	128.87	134.05	138.77
Southern	136.78	131.32	144.56	148.40	147.18	147.69	148.88	158.12	163.84	169.10
South West	161.02	163.61	170.41	166.61	160.71	163.76	165.99	176.97	177.93	179.92
Thames	112.34	117.08	114.58	120.74	124.57	130.32	136.29	140.78	138.33	139.87
Wessex	153.21	171.55	167.14	161.40	155.27	151.84	151.98	161.34	171.82	177.39
Yorkshire	115.39	118.01	125.25	126.72	129.18	128.05	128.99	139.26	145.94	151.46
England and Wales	123.17	125.86	132.76	132.92	132.72	134.05	136.46	145.26	148.96	153.15

(£)

	1988–89	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Anglian	201.59	218.36	229.30	241.78	256.27	270.02	286.02	298.28	302.89	307.47
Dŵr Cymru	200.29	205.95	218.08	231.05	246.68	261.33	278.26	279.63	281.24	283.09
Northumbrian	140.85	150.19	159.46	174.51	181.07	191.50	204.63	208.92	212.69	216.79
North West	148.01	154.64	161.58	168.84	175.86	186.67	197.75	205.88	214.39	221.52
Severn Trent	145.36	148.72	157.55	164.28	172.76	179.95	195.34	199.16	204.47	207.10
Southern	172.39	174.35	179.76	192.08	197.47	202.19	215.34	227.65	236.09	245.23

(£)

	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98
South West	191.08	204.09	213.17	227.22	258.66	294.11	331.35	339.98	343.96	351.92
Thames	141.52	141.76	146.73	153.12	159.20	167.79	176.85	184.42	188.45	191.37
Wessex	186.78	193.49	199.68	208.95	216.62	230.01	244.20	248.96	251.02	256.12
Yorkshire	156.73	171.72	176.37	183.24	187.78	196.61	209.23	218.04	223.84	222.88
England and Wales	159.51	166.76	174.38	183.83	192.92	203.22	215.97	222.16	226.87	230.37

1. The table shows the average household bills, for those charged on an unmeasured basis only, of customers of the water and sewerage companies in England and Wales, and, before privatisation, of customers of the regional water authorities.

2. Charges before and after privatisation in 1989 are not strictly comparable. In particular regional water authorities charged for some services that were not transferred to the privatised water companies.

European Union

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list his Department's priorities for the United Kingdom presidency of the European Union. [12970]

Angela Eagle: The forthcoming presidency of the European Union will provide an excellent opportunity for the UK to lead discussions on a wide range of important environmental and transport issues. Discussion of the many possibilities are currently taking place and I will write to my hon. Friend when final decisions on the departmental priorities have been decided.

Railway Lines (Children)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps have been taken to ensure the continuation of the scheme operated by the British Railways Board for train drivers to visit schools to alert children to the dangers of trespassing on railway lines. [12884]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 15 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *131*.

British Railways Board

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the value of the land owned by the British Railways Board. [12886]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The book value of the freehold properties held by the board at mid-October was £125 million.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what is the current acreage of land owned by the British Railways Board; [12885]

(2) how much of its land the British Railways Board disposed of in each of the last three years by *(a)* acreage and *(b)* value. [12887]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 15 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *130-31*.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what reviews his Department has undertaken of the transportation of radioactive waste by land, sea and air for reprocessing purposes to Sellafield. [12951]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The safety regulations for the transport of radioactive material, including radioactive waste, are reviewed nationally and internationally on an ongoing basis to ensure that the good safety record of this transport is maintained.

The then Advisory Committee on the Safe Transport of Radioactive Materials—ACTRAM—carried out an independent study of the safety of transport of low level waste, published in 1988 as "The Transport of Low Level Radioactive Waste in the UK, ISBN 0 11 752087", a copy of which is held in the Library.

In addition, the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee—RWMAC—has published a report, "The Import and Export of Radioactive Waste, ISBN 1 85112 0467 (September 1997)", a copy of which is in the Library. RWMAC recommends that special tests be applied to each application for the import or export of radioactive waste, to ensure it accords with Government policy.

The Department also commissions periodic studies of the radiological impact of the transport of radioactive material on a modal basis. The latest studies carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) on the Department's behalf are: "Radiological Impact of the Normal Transport of Radioactive Materials by Sea", by R. Gelder, NRPB Memorandum NRPB-M749 (December 1996); "Radiation Exposure from the Normal Transport of Radioactive Materials within the UK 1991 Review", by R. Gelder, NRPB Report NRPB-R255, ISBN 0 85951 351 3 (May 1992); and "Radiological Impact of the Normal Transport of Radioactive Materials by Air", by R. Gelder, NRPB Memorandum NRPB-M219 (March 1990).

Train Operating Companies

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the applications by some train operating companies to extend the duration of their franchise agreements. [12874]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend has recently received such an application from Great North Eastern Railway Limited. Applications will be considered on their merits. However, there would need to be very convincing arguments of public interest and value for money to justify renegotiation of contracts which were freely entered into following a competitive process.

New Local Authorities

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate his Department has made of the additional annual revenue costs or savings achieved by new local authorities created since 1994 relative to the revenue costs of their predecessor authorities in their last year of operation. [12940]

Mr. Raynsford: The Department has made no estimates of this nature.

Radioactive Materials

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his Department's policy towards the proposed shipment of radioactive materials from Australia to Dounreay. [12952]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department will ensure that any such shipments of irradiated nuclear fuel for reprocessing comply with the appropriate national and international safety regulations, current at the time of shipment, to ensure control of the hazards to persons, property and the environment. In keeping with Government policy, the contract to reprocess this fuel, if signed, will contain a clause to ensure the return of the separated wastes to Australia.

West Coast Main Line

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what arrangements he has made for the Exchequer to share in revenue generated by the Railtrack/Virgin scheme for the modernisation of the west coast main line railway. [12877]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The franchise agreement with Virgin Trains requires Virgin to introduce significantly accelerated and enhanced services following the upgrade of the west coast main line. The franchise was let through the competitive tender process and the winning bid from Virgin commits them to turn a subsidy of £76.8 million in 1997–98 to a premium payment of £220.3 million in 2011–12. There are no arrangements for the Exchequer to share in revenues.

M25

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Highways Agency will place in the Library the names and addresses of the 4,000 people who objected to the M25 widening scheme between junctions 12 and 15 in the official consultation period that ended in July 1996. [12876]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* In accordance with registration under the Data Protection Act 1984, the names of the objectors were published with the decision letter issued on 18 March 1997, a copy of which was deposited in the Library. To place their addresses in the Library would contravene the provisions of the Act.

Motorway Drivers (Tests)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure all newly qualified drivers pass a specific motorway test before being allowed to undertake unsupervised motorway driving; and if he will make a statement. [12899]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* My noble Friend the Minister for Roads announced on 15 October that the Government would be setting new road safety targets for the year 2010. Targets will be set within an outline strategy for achieving them. The questions of new drivers and motorway training will be considered in setting that strategy.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what have been the transitional costs of transferring services from preceding authorities to successor authorities in respect of each local authority reorganisation, including fire service reorganisation, in England in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 1997; and what are the estimated transitional costs for each such reorganisation in 1998. [12939]

Mr. Raynsford: Resources in the form of supplementary credit approvals are made available to reorganising authorities under the local government reorganisation costs scheme. The supplementary credit approvals issued to each authority under the schemes for 1994–95, 1995–96, 1996–97 and the maximum amounts issued under the 1997–98 scheme are set out in the table. Figures for 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 include supplementary credit approvals issued by the Home Office to combined fire authorities.

£000s

Local authority	*1994–95 outturn*		*1995–96 outturn*		*1996–97 outturn*		*1997–98 initial*	
	Bid	*Allocation*	*Bid*	*Allocation*	*Bid*	*Allocation*	*Bid*	*Allocation*
Isle of Wight	2,187	2,187	1,536	1,536	no bid	0	no bid	
Total	2,187	2,187	1,536	1,536	0	0	0	0
Cleveland			5,726	3,169				
Hartlepool	548	548	3,727	3,200	2,530	2,350	1,860	1,200
Redcar and Cleveland	87	87	3,353	2,891	3,405	3,405	4,057	900
Middlesbrough	194	194	2,370	2,160	4,471	2,950	2,183	1,300
Stockton	498	498	2,947	2,947	3,951	3,450	3,515	800
Combined Fire Authority				55		100		
County total	1,327	1,327	18,123	14,422	14,357	12,255	11,615	4,200
Avon			3,098	2,910				
Bristol			3,128	2,719	4,369	3,600	3,510	900
North Somerset			3,197	3,197	3,119	3,100	3,527	800
Banes[1]			2,783	2,783	3,404	3,404	3,039	900

£000s

Local authority	*1994–95 outturn*		*1995–96 outturn*		*1996–97 outturn*		*1997–98 initial*	
	Bid	*Allocation*	*Bid*	*Allocation*	*Bid*	*Allocation*	*Bid*	*Allocation*
South Gloucestershire[1]			2,712	2,712	3,498	3,498	3,994	1,000
Combined Fire Authority				55		100		
County total			14,918	14,376	14,390	13,702	14,070	3,600
Humberside			4,592	2,900				
Kingston Upon Hull			3,865	3,080	3,625	3,450	4,264	700
East Riding of Yorkshire[1]			4,708	3,454	8,342	8,000	5,035	2,500
North Lincolnshire[1]			3,206	2,992	2,919	2,919	5,094	700
North East Lincolnshire[1]			3,315	2,950	4,112	4,112	5,655	700
Combined Fire Authority				55		100		
County total			19,686	15,431	18,998	18,581	20,048	4,600
North Yorkshire			2,055	1,400	402	402		
Ryedale			0		no bid	0		
Selby			685	685	69	69		
York[1]			3,912	3,546	3,145	3,145	2,360	800
Combined Fire Authority				35		50		
County total			6,652	5,666	3,616	3,666	2,360	800
Total for 1995–96 Authorities	3,514	3,514	60,915	51,431	51,361	48,204	48,093	13,200
Bedfordshire			86	0	2,157	1,900	2,310	700
Luton			128	0	5,014	3,680	7,563	3,300
Combined Fire Authority						45		50
County total			214	0	7,171	5,625	9,873	4,050
Buckinghamshire				0	no bid	0		
Milton Keynes			451	0	2,932	2,932	2,434	2,200
Combined Fire Authority						0		50
County total			451	0	2,932	2,932	2,434	2,250
Derbyshire				0	1,909	1,900	1,685	900
Derby City			117	0	3,651	2,850	3,590	2,600
Combined Fire Authority						45		50
County total			117	0	5,560	4,795	5,275	3,550
Dorset				0	no bid	0	1,210	400
Bournemouth				0	3,005	3,005	7,129	2,700
Poole			411	0	3,582	3,250	3,240	2,600
Combined Fire Authority						45		50
County total			411	0	6,587	6,300	11,579	5,750
Durham				0	no bid	0	650	400
Darlington			237	0	4,430	4,430	1,662	1,660
Combined Fire Authority						45		50
County total			237	0	4,430	4,475	2,312	2,110
East Sussex				0	2,531	1,850	2,641	1,700
Brighton and Hove[1]			158	0	9,172	4,800	5,034	4,000
Combined Fire Authority						45		50
County total			158	0	11,703	6,695	7,675	5,750
Hampshire				0	3,056	2,200	2,710	1,400
Portsmouth			126	0	3,502	2,950	3,586	2,600
Southampton			516	0	3,982	3,050	3,551	2,700
Combined Fire Authority						45		50
County total			642	0	10,540	8,245	9,847	6,750
Leicestershire				0	1,562	1,562	936	800
Leicester City			75	0	3,875	3,200	3,114	3,100

£000s

Local authority	*1994–95 outturn*		*1995–96 outturn*		*1996–97 outturn*		*1997–98 initial*	
	Bid	*Allocation*	*Bid*	*Allocation*	*Bid*	*Allocation*	*Bid*	*Allocation*
Rutland				0	998	998	1,265	1,260
Combined Fire Authority						45		50
County total			75	0	6,435	5,805	5,315	5,210
Staffordshire				0	5,238	2,000	605	500
Stoke on Trent			147	0	4,109	2,950	2,923	2,400
Combined Fire Authority						45		50
County total			147	0	9,347	4,995	3,528	2,950
Wiltshire			28	0	1,620	1,350	230	80
Swindon			362	0	6,323	3,000	1,083	800
Combined Fire Authority						45		50
County total			390	0	7,943	4,395	1,313	930
Total for 1997 authroities			2,842	0	72,648	54,262	59,151	39,300
Berkshire					486	0	9,150	1,100
Bracknell Forest					226	0	3,694	2,100
Newbury					201	0	4,680	2,400
Reading					150	0	4,081	2,700
Slough					911	0	2,930	1,900
Windsor and Maidenhead					349	0	4,550	2,200
Wokingham					No bid	0	5,847	2,900
County total					2,323	0	34,932	15,300
Hereford and Worcester					no bid	0	2,090	300
Hereford City					no bid	0	350	100
Leominister					no bid	0	489	150
Malvern Hills					no bid	0	1,100	200
South Herefordshire					no bid	0	165	50
Herefordshire (shadow)						0		1,000
Worcestershire (shadow)						0		1,000
Malvern Hills (shadow)						0		1,000
County total					0	0	4,194	3,800
Devon					no bid	0	5,090	1,000
Plymouth					175	0	8,038	2,600
Torbay					no bid	0	7,200	3,000
County total					175	0	20,328	6,600
Essex					no bid	0	5,504	500
Southend on Sea					no bid	0	4,359	2,100
Thurrock					423	0	5,215	2,400
County total					423	0	15,078	5,000
Nottinghamshire					no bid	0	4,860	400
Nottingham					468	0	5,727	2,700
County total					468	0	10,587	3,100
Cheshire					no bid	0	1,188	500
Halton					no bid	0	3,395	2,200
Warrington					no bid	0	5,680	3,000
County total					0	0	10,263	5,700
Shropshire					no bid	0	2,556	300
The Wrekin					no bid	0	7,690	2,400
County total					0	0	10,246	2,700
Kent					no bid	0	1,975	1,000
Gillingham					no bid	0	1,060	200
Rochester					no bid	0	1,184	400
Medway Towns (shadow)						0		1,000
County total					0	0	4,219	2,600

£000s

Local authority	*1994–95 outturn*		*1995–96 outturn*		*1996–97 outturn*		*1997–98 initial*	
	Bid	*Allocation*	*Bid*	*Allocation*	*Bid*	*Allocation*	*Bid*	*Allocation*
Cambridgeshire					no bid	0	3,220	400
Peterborough					no bid	0	4,612	2,900
County total					0	0	7,832	3,300
Lancashire					no bid	0	4,104	800
Blackburn with Darwen					348	0	5,240	2,700
Blackpool					no bid	0	5,371	2,700
County total					348	0	14,715	6,200
Total for 1998 authorities					3,737	0	132,394	54,300
Grand total	3,514	3,514	63,757	51,431	127,746	102,466	239,638	106,800

[1] Includes allocations to predecessor authorities.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 29 October 1997

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Road Scheme Tenders

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what has been the overall cost of compensation for abortive tenders as a result of the Government's announcements of deferrals under the accelerated consideration of major road schemes announced in July. [12263]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Relevant claims for compensation will be considered on their merits. Once agreement has been reached on any sums payable in compensation these will be made public.

West Coast Main Line

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reasons an advance warning note on the engineering work conducted on the west coast main line on the weekend of 18 to 19 October was not issued by Virgin Trains or Railtrack. [12878]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This is an operational matter for Railtrack and Virgin Trains.

Weald and Downland Roads Project

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment, Transport and the Regions what criteria will apply to the Weald and Downland design, build, finance and operate project under the general roads review; what is the timing of the roads review; and what is the earliest date by which tenders for the project could be revitalised. [12781]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Following the announcement in July of the decisions made under the accelerated review, the Weald and Downland design, build, finance and operate project is no longer being taken forward as a single project. The individual schemes which were included in the project are being considered as part of the main Roads Review and will be assessed along with all other schemes against the five criteria of accessibility, safety, economy, the enviornment and integration. We hope to announce the results of the review next year. Any revitalisation of tenders for the project would be dependent on the results of the Roads Review.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what compensation has been paid to companies involved with the Downland design, build, finance and operate scheme for the cancellation of the project. [12782]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No compensation has been paid. Relevant claims for compensation will be considered on their merits.

Environmental Health Regulations

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will require local authorities issuing enforcement notices to *(a)* hotels and *(b)* other establishments in respect of environmental health regulations to register such findings in the public register; and if he will make a statement. [12807]

Angela Eagle: The Environment and Safety Information Act 1988 requires all authorities, including local authorities, responsible for the issue of enforcement notices under the Fire Precautions Act 1971, the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 and the Food and Environmental Protection Act 1985 to place details of the substance of such notices on a public register if the notices have public safety or environmental implications. This requirement applies to all types of premises. Each responsible authority maintains its own registers, which may be inspected free of charge.

Humber Bridge

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to introduce legislation to obtain powers to suspend or write off part of the Humber bridge debt. [12854]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In the new year I hope to lay before Parliament, with the approval of HM Treasury, an Order under the Humber Bridge (Debts) Act 1996. This will provide that the Humber Bridge Board will not have to meet a proportion of its current debt or, on the residual debt, a proportion of the interest that would otherwise be due. Officials of my Department are currently considering options and financial projections with officers of the Board.

Sonus Studies

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what were the results of the Sonus studies. [12857]

Angela Eagle: The Sonus research programme is leading to a better understanding of the flux of nutrients, particularly nitrogen, from the land, though estuaries, to the sea, especially in relation to the nitrification/denitrification processes in estuaries. The main work in the Southampton Water/Solent region indicates that algal blooms of phytoplankton occur only when tidal energy is below a certain level and light levels are sufficiently high. We hope to extend this work to allow data from the whole of 1997 to be incorporated. A final report will be produced at the end of the contract.

Montserrat

Mr. John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps his Department is proposing to ensure that adequate housing is available for evacuees from Montserrat. [13848]

Ms Armstrong: Local authorities need to be able to respond as flexibly as possible to the needs of Montserratians arriving here under the Government's Montserrat assisted passage scheme, which provides for voluntary evacuation.

We recognise that authorities will incur additional costs when making accommodation available to people who would not normally have applied to them for housing. Montserrat is a British Dependent Territory and the evacuees have lost their homes. We must do our best to ensure that evacuees coming here under the MAP Scheme are given as smooth a reception as possible, although it may not always be possible to accommodate them in the area they would prefer.

We are proposing to offer a special grant to encourage authorities to make vacant property more quickly available to house evacuees who have come to this country under the MAP Scheme and who have nowhere to stay. This should help settle evacuees throughout the country under arrangements set up by the Home Office. Evacuees with a Montserratian passport are already broadly eligible for the same welfare benefits, state education, healthcare and access to social housing as UK nationals.

The special grant would be provided under the Local Government Finance Act 1988, and we intend to submit a report for the House's approval early next year. The Department has written today to Chief Executives and Chief Housing Officers of English local housing authorities, setting out details of the scheme and arrangements for making claims. Copies of the letter have been placed in the Library. Subject to approval of the House, £1,500 will be made available for each unit of accommodation provided for qualifying households placed with local authorities by the Home Office between 27 August 1997 and 31 January 1998. The grant scheme has been drawn up after consultation with the Local Government Association.

Grant will be offered on a similar basis by the Housing Corporation to registered social landlords who independently offer to provide accommodation for evacuees under the Home Office's arrangements.

National Forest

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will report on the National Forest Company's progress in creating the national forest in the east midlands. [13849]

Angela Eagle: Copies of the National Forest Company's annual report and accounts for 1996–97 are to be placed in the House Libraries.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Trainees

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what his definition is of a trainee. [13043]

Dr. Howells: A trainee, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary and myself, is a person undergoing training.

Social Affairs Council

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Social Affairs Council on 7 October. [13738]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Minister of State at the Department of Trade and Industry and I represented the UK at the Social Affairs Council on 7 October.

A structured dialogue with Social Affairs and Employment Ministers from the applicant states in central and eastern Europe discussed the accession strategy in relation to health and safety for workers, equal opportunities for men and women, and social dialogue.

The presidency gave further details about the preparatory work for the Extraordinary European Council on Employment (taking place in Luxembourg on 20–21 November), and announced that there would be a supplementary meeting of the Social Affairs Council on 6 November to contribute to preparations.

Informal political agreement was reached on the proposed amendment to the regulation establishing the European Training Foundation. The amendment will extend the foundation's remit to provide vocational education and training assistance to the MEDA partnership countries and territories, and will introduce procedural changes to increase the foundation's efficient management.

Political agreement was reached on the proposal for a recommendation to introduce a Community model parking badge for people with disabilities, which will be recognised across member states.

There was continuing discussion of the proposals for a European company statute, following the report of the Davignon group.

The Council noted the work programme of the Employment and Labour Market Committee.

The Commission gave two presentations: first, on the draft directive to give effect to the social partners' framework agreement on ensuring that part-time workers should be treated no less favourably than full-time workers, and secondly on a White Paper on the sectors excluded from the working time directive—transport, sea fishing, offshore sectors, and doctors in training.

The presidency withdrew from the agenda an item on the programme for research, analysis and co-operation in employment.

Early Retirement

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each month from September 1996 to September 1997 the number of teachers, other than those in further or higher education or independent schools, who retired under the age of 60 years. [13048]

Mr. Byers: The number of retirements aged under 60 from the maintained schools sector in England and Wales between September 1996 and September 1997 are given in the following table:

Month[1]	*Number of retirements*[2, 3]
September 1996	7,880
October 1996	340
November 1996	420
December 1996	220
January 1997	1,800
February 1997	260
March 1997	2,460
April 1997	2,560
May 1997	590
June 1997	390
July 1997	270
August 1997	1,070
September 1997	8,920

[1] Represents the month in which benefits first become payable.

[2] Provisional. The figures for August and September 1997 are particularly likely to increase because of late notifications.

[3] Figures rounded to nearest 10.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which his Department is responsible, indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes the last year for which figures are available. [12567]

Mr. Morley: MAFF has developed procurement procedures based upon guidance issued by the Central Unit on Purchasing in HM Treasury. These procedures are designed to ensure probity and fairness in all procurement decisions and provide the necessary checks and authorisations in accordance with Government Accounting and separate the functions of verification and authorisation from the process of payment.

MAFF has implemented a fully integrated computerised accounting system (RAMIS—Resource Accounting and Management Information System) running on proprietary software and hardware. Implementation of the system has been supported fully by the primary software and hardware suppliers supplemented with specialised external service providers as necessary. These have been provided for under contract. Generally the Ministry does not use subcontractors for payment work; the exception is the use of managing agents to pay small contractors for minor building maintenance work to ensure that they are paid quickly. Payments for goods and services are made using RAMIS either by bank transfer (CHAPS and BACS) or as system-generated payable orders. Significant work has been undertaken by Ministry staff to ensure that the system has been developed to meet initial and changing requirements.

As part of a suite of functions within RAMIS the Accounts Payable application is one element of a much wider financial management system and specific capital and development costs are therefore not readily available. However, information collected from within the management system suggests that the administrative costs of making payments via the system (for Headquarters Groups) is approximately £4 per payment based upon inner London staff costs.

MAFF is an active member of the Oracle Applications User Group in which other Government Departments may be involved.

Fur Farming

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what proposals he has made for improvement in fur farming husbandry to the Council of Europe; and what recommendations he has made relating to an increase in the present minimum cage dimensions; [12769]

(2) if, in the current discussions at the Council of Europe on fur farming, he will ensure that only housing systems which meet the biological needs of mink, pine martens and arctic foxes, with particular reference to the provision of *(a)* a stimulating environment, *(b)* social contact and *(c)* swimming water, will meet the statutory minimum standards; and if he will ensure that a timetable will be laid down for the phasing out of all housing for these animals which does not meet such standards. [12770]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The Standing Committee of the European Convention on the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes is reviewing its 1991 recommendation on the welfare of animals farmed for fur. The text currently under discussion proposes detailed requirements for the welfare of mink, polecat, silver and Arctic fox, coypu and chinchilla. We shall be working to ensure that the outcome of this exercise is the adoption of the highest possible standards consistent with the scientific evidence and expert opinion.

We would support a timetable for the phasing out of all housing for these animals that does not meet the standards adopted by the Council of Europe.

River Medway

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports he has received from the Environment Agency, and on what dates, concerning the potential flood dangers in areas abutting the River Medway consequent on increasing sea levels and surge tides; and if he will make a statement. [12969]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The Department has not received any specific reports from the Environment Agency on this subject.

TREASURY

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which his Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all subcontractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12557]

Mrs. Liddell: The table lists the Treasury functions and management systems and their costs during 1996–97 that relate to the payment for goods and services in the Treasury:

£000

	Capital cost	*Running cost*
Functions		
Goods receipt	—	17
Invoice registration	—	101
Budget holder confirmation	—	7
Payment of invoice	—	204
Management system		
Financial and Management Information Systems (FAMIS)—Estimated cost of invoice processing elements	20	11
Totals	20	340

The FAMIS accounting system purchased runs the *cfacs* software from Cedardata plc. Their sub-contractors were The Oracle Corporation UK Ltd. and Waverley.

During the procurement process several Departments, including the Ministry of Defence and the Scottish Office, were approached for information on Cedardata and the *cfacs* product. Departments including the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food and other organisations were consulted regarding the competing products.

Asbestos-related Diseases

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the figures for deaths through asbestos-related diseases in Norfolk over the last five years. [12954]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Dr. Ian Gibson, dated 29 October 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), to your recent Parliamentary question asking for the figures for deaths through asbestos-related diseases in Norfolk over the last five years.

The latest data available are given in the following table:

Deaths from asbestos-related diseases in Norfolk 1993–1996

	Number
1993	12
1994	18
1995	24
1996	21

Note:

Since 1993, the ONS has coded all diseases, injuries, drugs, operations and external causes mentioned on death certificates. This information is held electronically and the ONS was able to extract data for 1993–1996. It is not possible to produce comparable figure for years prior to 1993, and any figures that could be produced would be in excess of the advisory limit for answering Parliamentary Questions.

Deaths from asbestos-related diseases were identified as those deaths certified with:

1. An underlying cause of asbestosis (International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision [ICD9]501), or

2. An underlying cause of lung cancer (ICD9 162) with secondary cause accidental poisoning–other metals (ICD9 E866.4); or

3. Any other case where mesothelioma was mentioned on the death certificate.

CABINET OFFICE

Millennium Experience

Mr. Austin: To ask the Minister without Portfolio in respect of the millennium experience (1) what plans he has to ensure that the millennium experience is fully accessible to disabled people; and if he will make a statement; [12851]

(2) what consultations he has had with disabled people regarding accessibility to the millennium experience by disabled people; [12852]

(3) what plans he has to ensure that the millennium experience is available to people with a sensory impairment. [12853]

Mr. Mandelson: The Government and the New Millennium Experience Company aim to ensure that all who wish to visit the Millennium Experience can do so, regardless of any disability an individual may have. An Advisory Group has been established by the NMEC to consider accessibility and special needs issues, reflecting the NMEC's concern to meet all relevant statutory requirements and to apply, wherever possible, voluntary codes, guidance and specifications.

The Advisory Group held its first meeting on 24 June. It is chaired by David Phillips, Chief Executive of Holiday Care Service, and its members are drawn from a range of voluntary sector organisations covering physical, sensory and learning disabilities, mental health issues, and the needs of older people. The group will provide best practice guidance to the NMEC on a wide range of accessibility issues including transportation, parking, the natural and the built environment, displays and facilities, on-site information and promotional materials, ticketing arrangements, and disability awareness training.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Border Controls

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in respect of the opt-out from the general application of the treaties of the European Community and Union concerning control by *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the Republic of Ireland of their national borders, what rights will arise for *(a)* and *(b)*, to (i) examine official identity documents carried by an entrant, (ii) search their person, (iii) examine their belongings, (iv) detain them temporarily for further inquiries and *(v)* detain them in custody; and if he will state for each of (i) to (v) the originating and authoritative national or Community-Union legislation providing such powers, and their manner of execution, in respect of (1) citizens of the European Union and (2) citizens of third nations. [12808]

Ms Quin: The Treaty of Amsterdam contains a Protocol which recognises the right of the United Kingdom to exercise, at its frontiers with other member states, such controls on persons seeking to enter the United Kingdom as it may consider necessary for the purpose of:

> verifying the right to enter the United Kingdom of European Union and other nationals of the European Economic Area and their dependants; and
>
> determining whether or not to grant other persons permission to enter the United Kingdom.

The Protocol states that nothing in the Treaties, or in any measures deriving from the Treaties, prejudices the United Kingdom's right to exercise such controls.

No powers will arise as a direct result of the Protocol. The United Kingdom will, however, continue to maintain the controls provided for under the Immigration (European Economic Area) Order 1994 and the Immigration Act 1971. Schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971 provides powers for immigration officers to examine and identify documents of passengers arriving in the United Kingdom, to search their person and belongings and to detain them pending a decision to give or to refuse leave to enter.

The operation of immigration controls in the Republic of Ireland is a mater for the Irish authorities.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Aerospace Employees

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name the British Aerospace employees who have been loaned to his Department to work on commercial projects setting out the embassies to which they are attached; whether they will work on *(a)* civil or *(b)* military projects; and if their function will be (i) executive or (ii) advisory. [12541]

Mr. Fatchett: The Chairman of British Aerospace has given support to our programme of business attachments to overseas posts by committing his company to providing a member of staff for secondment. BAe is still in the process of identifying suitable candidates to put forward for the scheme. No specific Posts or projects have been identified at this stage.

European Commission Committees

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many committees are appointed to assist the European Commission in implementing Community legislation; how often they meet; what is the nature of their *(a)* ministerial and *(b)* parliamentary supervision; and if he will make a statement. [12745]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Council comitology decision of 13 July 1987 provides for certain types of committee to assist the Commission in the implementation of Council legislation. The European Community budget for 1997 provides for 374 such committees. They meet as and when their opinion is required for the implementation of Council legislation. The majority of these committees are made up of officials who represent the Member States. UK officials are under the supervision of Government Ministers, who in turn are answerable to Parliament.

Kenya

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet representatives of the Kenyan Government to discuss human rights issues. [12549]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised human rights issues with the Kenyan Foreign Minister during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Edinburgh. We shall follow this up vigorously in the run-up to the forthcoming Kenyan elections.

Kyoto Climate Change Conference

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the agenda for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting will include discussion relating to the Kyoto climate change conference. [12711]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the statement that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made to the House yesterday, *Official Report*, columns 707–19.

Electro-shock Weapons

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson), of 28 July, *Official Report*, columns *65–66*, on the export of certain types of equipment, what is the evidence that equipment designed primarily for torture, sold abroad by Britain, has in the past been used for torture; and if he will place a copy of the evidence in the Library. [12592]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have received many reports of equipment being used overseas for torture from, for example, UN Rapporteurs, NGOs, the media and our Diplomatic Posts. Most of this information is publicly available.

We have decided on measures to prevent the export or transhipment from the UK of particular items of equipment where such reporting provides a clear pattern of abuse. These measures, announced on 28 July, *Official Report*, columns *65–66*, are based on such reports of the use of similar equipment of any origin, not specifically the use of British equipment.

Dependent Territories

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the terms of reference of the review of the status of dependent territories. [12962]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* There are no formal terms of reference. However, a memorandum about the review has been submitted to the Foreign Affairs Committee.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Engineering Industry

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support the Engineering Council received from her Department in developing its regulatory document, "Standards and Routes to Registration"; what is her Department's policy towards the document in respect of its application to the engineering profession and the engineering industry in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [12799]

Mr. Battle: The Department of Trade and Industry has provided strategic advice to the Engineering Council during the drafting of the revised edition of Standards and Routes to Registration (SARTOR)—especially concerning the needs of industry. I support the requirements set out in the revised SARTOR in so far as they aim to raise standards within engineering to improve the UK's competitiveness.

Torture Equipment

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will estimate the monetary value of torture equipment, as defined under the Government's new arms export criteria, exported overseas, in each of the last five years. [12340]

Mrs. Roche: The criteria that were announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 28 July, *Official Report*, columns 26–29, do not include any definition of "torture equipment".

In a separate announcement on 28 July, *Official Report*, columns 65–66, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs identified certain equipment for which there is evidence of its use for torture or other abuses, and whose export the Government were banning. As my right hon. Friend made clear, some of this equipment is not at present controlled and the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 will be amended to bring them under control; this will be done soon. As companies are generally not required to report exports to my Department, we do not know the extent or value of any exports from the UK of equipment covered by the ban.

Biotechnology

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the Minister of State's letter of 23 August to the Member for Linlithgow, what assessments she has made of proposals she has received from *(a)* the Gaia Foundation and *(b)* other organisations concerning the European Commission's proposed directive on the Legal Protection of Biotechnological Inventions; and what reply her Department has sent. [12860]

Mr. Battle: Consultation on the proposed directive has so far involved written representations from well over 100 interest groups, including those concerned with health care, the environment, animal welfare and the Church. There has also been a special meeting of the Standing Advisory Committee on Industrial Property which advises the Government on matters relating to patents, at which the Gaia Foundation and others gave their views on the proposed Directive. Following this meeting, the Gaia Foundation, the Women's Environmental Network and others met my officials at the Patent Office to discuss the directive. During this consultation, there has been ongoing discussions with all other Government Departments having an interest in the directive.

Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are her plans for the future of the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation; and if she will make a statement. [12480]

Mr. Battle: The Charity Commission is currently reviewing the role of the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation and the associated mining charities and are due to report soon. I wish to await the outcome of the review and assess its implications before taking a view on the way forward.

Ministerial Working Arrangements

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many days she spent in the office between 1 August and 5 October inclusive, counting a working day as eight hours of meetings or working on papers in the office. [13046]

Mrs. Beckett: I have not worked it out and have no intention of spending the time required to do so.

Ministers' Shareholdings

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list all the shareholdings of Ministers in her Department and their wives or husbands, whether now held in a blind trust or not, including where they have been transferred, and the shares held at the point of transfer. [13045]

Mrs. Beckett: No. The Government have published the requirements on Ministers in the ministerial code; DTI Ministers are acting in accordance with these requirements. It has never been the practice of previous Ministers, including DTI Ministers, to publish details of their shareholdings, except insofar as this is required by the Register of Members' Interests; they have from time to time made public statements about their decision to stand aside from particular issues where that has been thought desirable in particular circumstances. This approach, reflecting that of previous Administrations to this issue, seems to the Government to satisfy the public interest.

HEALTH

Hepatitis C

Miss Melanie Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's policy in respect of screening for, and treatment of, hepatitis C. [12300]

Ms Jowell: Blood donations have been screened for antibodies to hepatitis C virus since September 1991 when reliable tests first became available. Recipients of blood or blood components donated before that date from donors since found to be carriers of hepatitis C virus are being traced in order to provide counselling, testing and specialist referral as appropriate. Organs and tissue, resulting from either live or cadaveric donations, are also screened for hepatitis C.

Injecting drug misusers who share contaminated equipment are at increased risk of acquiring hepatitis C infection. The guidance to purchasers of drug treatment and care services, which the Department issued in March 1997, included advice for purchasers on dealing with those who seek testing for hepatitis C. The "Guidelines for Doctors on the Clinical Management of Drug Misusers" last issued in 1991 are currently being revised and will be published next year. They will include updated advice on the management of hepatitis C in drug misusers.

There is a need to increase knowledge about the natural history, prevalence, transmission and treatment of hepatitis C so that the National Health Service is equipped to deliver services based on the best scientific advice available about the disease. In 1996, the Department made £1 million available for research in these areas. The results of the research commissioned so far will become available over the next three years. A further £500,000 will be allocated this year to expand the research programme.

In addition, the NHS Health Technology Assessment is considering research proposals to establish the effectiveness of the early treatment of chronic hepatitis C with alpha interferon. The NHS Executive is funding the Royal College of Physicians to facilitate the development of clinical guidelines on the appropriate use of alpha interferon in patients with hepatitis C.

Miss Melanie Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made as to the economic and social consequences to individuals and to the Exchequer of not treating hepatitis C. [12301]

Ms Jowell: Attempts to estimate the long term consequences of hepatitis C to the individual and the Exchequer are confounded by the unpredictability of the progression of the disease. Some individuals will clear the virus naturally, developing no long term symptoms, and others will go on to develop liver disease but often not for 20 to 30 years after initial infection with the virus. A proportion of those with liver disease will go on to develop liver failure or liver cancer.

Current knowledge about the natural history is insufficient to make firm estimates of the type requested. There is a comprehensive programme of research in place examining the natural history, transmission and prevalence of hepatitis C. Consideration is also being given through the Health Technology Assessment Programme to funding a clinical trail to examine the clinical and the cost effectiveness of treating hepatitis C with drug therapy at an earlier stage than is current clinical practice. These studies should enable some comparison to be made about the relative clinical effectiveness of treatment at different stages of the disease and will facilitate the evaluation of the economic and social costs of hepatitis C.

Drinking Water (Phosphates)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his Department's letter of 24 September (POH/3/5437/14), if he has taken steeps to ascertain the background and results of Finnish research on phosphates in drinking water. [12858]

Ms Jowell: The background and results of the Finnish research have been considered. We do not believe that they have any implications for the levels of phosphorus present in United Kingdom drinking water supplies.

Hospital and Community Health Services

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will announce the 1998–99 hospital and community health services revenue allocations for health authorities. [13394]

Mr. Dobson: The 1998–99 hospital and community health services revenue allocations for weighted populations are given, by health authority, in the following table.

1989–99 Health Authority General Allocations

	£000
Avon	429,674
Barking and Havering	190,213
Barnet	155,454
Barnsley	110,005
Bedfordshire	224,367
Berkshire	310,601
Bexley and Greenwich	222,784
Birmingham	506,138
Bradford	229,200
Brent and Harrow	239,173
Bromley	134,830
Buckinghamshire	263,789
Bury and Rochdale	183,925
Calderdale and Kirkless	272,948
Cambridge and Huntingdon	170,382
Camden and Islington	251,800
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	227,525
County Durham	298,927
Coventry	142,724
Croydon	152,812
Doncaster	138,789
Dorset	327,559
Dudley	134,546
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	359,671
East and North Hertfordshire	205,,436
East Kent	289,217
East Lancashire	253,100
East London and the City	366,867
East Norfolk	270,403
East Riding	261,793
East Surrey	182,949
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	372,547
Enfield and Haringey	248,639
Gateshead and South Tyneside	187,624
Gloucestershire	242,648
Herefordshire	72,096
Hillingdon	118,252
Isle of Wight	67,949
Kensington, Chelsea an Westminster	212,220
Kingston and Richmond	156,580
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	442,521
Leeds	339,927
Leicestershire	378,967
Lincolnshire	278,608
Liverpool	253,814
Manchester	250,313
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	322,343
Morecambe Bay	151,742
Newcastle and North Tyneside	248,792
North and East Devon	221,388

1989–99 Health Authority General Allocations

	£000
North and Mid Hampshire	215,612
North Cheshire	151,836
North Cumbria	144,729
North Derbyshire	167,949
North Essex	370,351
North Nottinghamshire	174,754
North Staffordshire	221,771
North West Anglia	180,010
North West Lancashire	234,450
North Yorkshire	318,712
Northamptonshire	252,747
Northumberland	141,701
Nottingham	286,648
Oxfordshire	234,530
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	240,760
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	231,328
Rotherham	119,916
Salford and Trafford	224,171
Sandwell	146,261
Sefton	145,852
Sheffield	271,140
Shropshire	178,325
Solihull	83,831
Somerset	210,919
South and West Devon	280,719
South Cheshire	292,831
South Derbyshire	246,395
South Essex	303,047
South Humber	145,527
South Lancashire	138,391
South Staffordshire	239,424
Southampton and South West Hampshire	235,558
St. Helen's and Knowsley	162,218
Stockport	126,212
Suffolk	280,922
Sunderland	147,757
Tees	269,175
Wakefield	152,248
Walsall	120,285
Warwickshire	218,459
West Hertfordshire	235,060
West Kent	406,653
West Pennine	225,704
West Surrey	274,394
West Sussex	342,161
Wigan and Bolton	273,219
Wiltshire	251,545
Wirral	163,688
Wolverhampton	118,036
Worcestershire	222,806
England	22,895,307

NORTHERN IRELAND

Economic Policies

7. **Shona McIsaac:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the Government's economic policies for Northern Ireland. [12413]

Mr. Ingram: The main thrust of our economic policies is in line with that applying to the rest of the United Kingdom.

We will put in place measures to improve the skill base and to tackle the deep-rooted problem of unemployment among young people and the long-term unemployed.

We will also implement programmes to encourage investment to achieve economic growth and improvement of the international competitiveness of Northern Ireland business and industry.

Comprehensive Spending Review

10. **Mr. Gareth Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the impact on Northern Ireland of the Government's spending review. [12416]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Northern Ireland Ministers and their Departments are examining the inherited spending plans for Northern Ireland to ensure that they align with the Government's objectives and to see how better use can be made of resources. I expect that the outcome of this review will have a positive impact on Northern Ireland.

Peace Process

11. **Mr. White:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in the multi-party talks on the future of Northern Ireland. [12417]

12. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement about developments in the peace process. [12418]

15. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on progress in the peace process and the decommissioning of weapons. [12421]

18. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in multi-party talks on the future of Northern Ireland. [12424]

19. **Mr. Pound:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the peace process in Northern Ireland. [12425]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friends the Members for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) and for Ealing, Acton and Shepherds Bush (Mr. Soley).

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the Government's plans for the next steps in all-party talks in Northern Ireland. [12422]

Marjorie Mowlam: The multi-party talks are now addressing issues of substance. The Governments will make every effort to facilitate the process of reaching a settlement which would be acceptable on both sides of the community in Northern Ireland, and more widely.

Anglo-Irish Conference

13. **Mr. Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she will make public the agendas, deliberations and decisions of the meetings of the Anglo-Irish conference and the activities of the Maryfield secretariat. [12419]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Government are committed to greater openness and transparency in the workings of the Anglo-Irish agreement and this issue will be discussed at the next meeting of the conference. Statements are already issued by the two Governments recording the agendas, deliberations and decisions reached at meetings of the conference and a list [illegible] the subjects on which briefings take place in the Secretariat involving officials is published quarterly.

Terrorist Arms and Explosives

14. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment her Department has made of the amount of arms and explosives which terrorist organisations currently hold; and if she will make a statement. [12420]

Mr. Ingram: The security forces maintain information about terrorist weaponry but it would not be appropriate for me to make this public. Terrorists retain sufficient arms and explosives to mount a sustained campaign of violence and bombing. There is no justification for this. The Government, together with the Government of the Republic of Ireland, have put in place the mechanisms for decommissioning and, though it is necessarily a voluntary process, those in possession of paramilitary weapons need to avail themselves of this unique opportunity to build confidence and contribute to lasting peace.

Decommissioning

17. **Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made on the decommissioning of illegal weapons in Northern Ireland. [12423]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow).

Northern Ireland Assembly

20. **Mr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when she last met the Taoiseach and Tanaiste to discuss matters relating to the creation of a Northern Ireland Assembly. [12426]

Marjorie Mowlam: I last met the Taoiseach on 1 July 1997 and the Tanaiste on 25 October 1997. At neither meeting did I discuss the creation of a Northern Ireland Assembly.

It will be for strand one of the multi-party talks, in which the Irish Government do not participate, to consider what political arrangements might be established for Northern Ireland.

Parades

21. **Mr. Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to reduce tensions over parades in Northern Ireland. [12427]

22. **Mr. McNulty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to reduce tensions over parades in Northern Ireland. [12428]

24. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to reduce tensions over parades in Northern Ireland. [12430]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) and for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge).

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in the implementation of the recommendations of the North report. [12432]

Marjorie Mowlam: As the hon. Member will know, the Public Processions etc. (Northern Ireland) Bill received its second reading in another place yesterday in line with the Government's commitment to the implementation of the North report's recommendations.

Unemployment

23. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the trends are in long-term unemployment in Northern Ireland. [12429]

Mr. Ingram: The latest available information relates to September 1997 and at that time there were 29,509 claimant long-term unemployed in Northern Ireland. This represents a reduction of 15,821 compared with a year earlier and reflects a generally downward trend in claimant long-term unemployment since spring 1993.

Energy Market

25. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the energy market in Northern Ireland. [12431]

Mr. Ingram: Northern Ireland's energy market is characterised by lack of competition, diseconomies of scale and isolation from other markets. Considerable progress is being made, within the region's energy strategy, to redress these problems.

Education

27. **Mrs. McKenna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on education in Northern Ireland. [12434]

Mr. Worthington: Education standards in Northern Ireland are generally good and are reflected in the level of participation in higher education, the standards achieved in GCE A level and GCSE and the levels achieved by 8,11 and 14-year-olds in the first year of statutory assessment in schools. These standards must, however, be improved if Northern Ireland is to compete successfully with the rest of Europe and plans are already being put in place to accelerate the rate of improvement. Particular priority will be given to measures to address underachievement which is a matter for concern in many schools.

Terrorism

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the number of *(a)* punishment beatings and *(b)* other terrorist activities since the first IRA ceasefire was declared. [12406]

Mr. Ingram: From 1 September 1994 to 12 October 1997, 685 paramilitary assaults have been recorded: 279 are attributed to loyalist groups and 406 to republican groups. In addition, there have been a further 100 punishment shooting attacks. A total of 331 shooting incidents, 231 bombings and 42 deaths have been recorded during the same period and have been attributed to the security situation.

The security forces will continue to seek ways to deter and detect such crimes while the political parties work towards achieving a lasting and peaceful settlement.

SCOTLAND

Learning Difficulties (Adults)

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy regarding future provision of residential care for adults with learning difficulties; and if he will make a statement. [12699]

Mr. Galbraith: The way in which people with learning difficulties are cared for, including where they live, is best determined by what best meets their needs. Local authorities, in consultation with their planning partners, will continue to have responsibility for ensuring that an appropriate range and volume of community care services are in place to respond to individuals' assessed needs and local circumstances. This includes residential accommodation for people with learning disabilities.

The Department of Health has commissioned research into the costs and outcomes of various types of residential accommodation for people with learning disabilities in England and Ireland. The research is expected to be completed around the end of 1998. We will give careful consideration to the findings.

Constables (Oath)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the oath taken by constables in Scotland and give the reasons why it differs from the oath taken in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Northern Ireland. [12308]

Mr. McLeish: A person appointed to the office of constable of a police force in Scotland is required to make the following declaration, prescribed in regulation 10 of the Police (Scotland) Regulations 1976, before a sheriff or justice of the peace:

> "I hereby do solemnly and sincerely and truly declare and affirm that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office of constable."

It differs from the oath in England and Wales, or the declaration in Northern Ireland, because ir derives from separate Scottish legislation. The declaration, largely in its current form, was first given statutory force by the Police (Scotland) Act 1857.

Ecstasy

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what follow-up action has been taken in respect of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs report on Ecstasy misuse. [12855]

Mr. Galbraith: The results of this work were made known to Parliament on 28 February 1997 in a written answer to the hon. Member for Essex, North (Mr. Jenkin), *Official Report,* columns *442–43.* The Government are using the Advisory Council's advice to inform work on future drug education strategies and campaigns and ensure that messages and advice for young people and parents about the risks associated with Ecstasy are as well informed and accurate as possible. The information was shared with the Health Education Board for Scotland, The Scottish Advisory Committee on Drug Misuse and the Scottish Against Drugs Campaign.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his Department's letter of 21 March, Ref. MMM 51837, what were the results of the research on the fingerprinting methods based on DNA technology in relation to E. coli. [12856]

Mr. Chisholm: Although the Department has not yet received final reports for these projects, interim results obtained from the two groups indicate that using a combination of different methods, both phenotypic and genotypic (DNA-based) isolates from three Scottish E.coli 0157 outbreaks—West Lothian, Central Scotland and Highland—although closely related were distinguishable from each other.

Kidney Services

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his letter of 19 August, when he expects to receive the result of the consideration by the sub-group on renal services in respect of *(a)* organ donation rates, *(b)* the quality of organs retrieved and *(c)* the effectiveness of the retrieval arrangements. [12859]

Mr. Galbraith: The Renal Disease Sub-Group is part of the Acute Services Review which is chaired by the Chief Medical Officer at The Scottish Office Department of Health. The Sub-Group's recommendations will be taken into account in the report which the Review is expected to present to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland in May 1998.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 30 October 1997

DEFENCE

Cyprus

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions during October *(a)* Greek and *(b)* Greek Cypriot military aircraft flew over United Kingdom sovereign base territory on the island of Cyprus; what representations were made; and if he will make a statement. [12872]

Dr. Reid: Two Hellenic Air Force F-16 fighter aircraft which were participating in a joint military exercise with the Republic of Cyprus overflew the Akrotiri sovereign base area at low altitude on Tuesday 14 October. The British high commission in Nicosia wrote to the Government of the Republic on 16 October reminding them of the existence of sovereign airspace over the SBAs and of the safety requirements.

Security Clearances

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the procedures whereby individuals with dual nationality, with security clearance to access MOD and NATO protectively marked material, are precluded from access to internal caveat information. [12800]

Mr. Spellar: The Ministry of Defence recently revised policy on access by dual nationals to national caveat information. Under the new policy there is no general ban on access by dual nationals to national caveat information. Decisions on access are made on a case-by-case basis. In the case of contractors' employees, the Department is required to seek the permission of the originator of the material before granting access.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Works of Art (Exports)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the 1996–97 annual report of the reviewing committee on the export of works of art will be published. [14159]

Mr. Chris Smith: The reviewing committee's annual report for 1996–97 has been published today and copies have been laid before Parliament.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Record Office

Mr. Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what factors he takes into account when considering appeals against the non-release of documents from the Public Record Office. [13214]

Mr. Hoon: Neither the Lord Chancellor nor I have considered any such appeals. The Advisory Council on Public Records advises on requests for the release of records made by historians and other members of the public which Departments reject, but the final responsibility for the release or otherwise of withheld records rests with the Ministers of the Departments concerned.

Magistrates (Warrington)

Helen Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many women magistrates were appointed to the Warrington bench in the past year; and what proportion of women applicants for that year this figure represents. [13193]

Mr. Hoon: One woman was appointed to the Warrington bench in 1997 out of 13 women applicants. One man was also appointed out of a total of 18 male applicants. Following the appointments, there were 55 women and 56 men on the Warrington bench.

Helen Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates currently serving on the Warrington bench are resident in the Warrington, North constituency; and what proportion of serving magistrates in Warrington this represents. [13194]

Mr. Hoon: Forty magistrates on the Warrington bench are resident in the Warrington, North constituency—36 per cent. of the Warrington bench.

Late Payments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the suppliers to his Department who are owed outstanding amounts, indicating the amounts and the due date on which the account should have been settled. [13549]

Mr. Hoon: All Departments are required to pay all their bills within agreed contract terms, or 30 days from receipt of the goods or service or a valid invoice, whichever is later, where no such terms exist. Such detailed information on payment performance for the current financial year could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Treasury will shortly be publishing a league table of departmental payment performance for 1996–97.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appeals in immigration cases, excluding asylum cases, are currently outstanding. [13345]

Mr. Hoon: At the end of September 1997, there were 9,410 non-asylum appeals outstanding.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Criminal Justice System

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 July, *Official Report*, column *263*, to the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd), on the review of delay in the criminal justice system, which recommendations for procedural changes in the youth court will be contained in the Crime and Disorder Bill. [12730]

Mr. Michael: The Crime and Disorder Bill will introduce wide-ranging reform of the youth justice system. The measures in the Bill, including the new final warning scheme and a range of new sentencing options, will improve the effectiveness of the youth justice system and the speed with which cases can be concluded.

The Bill will include the legislative provisions necessary to implement the following recommendations from the review of delay in the criminal justice system for procedural reform in the youth court:

> recommendation 31: stipendiary magistrates should be able to sit alone in the youth court and should specialise in the management of particularly complex cases;
>
> recommendation 32: when the Crown Court deals with a grave offence it should also deal with other related charges;
>
> recommendation 33: the requirement that there should be an hour's interval between sittings of the magistrates' court and the youth court in a courtroom should be abolished.

The Government also intend to give the youth court discretion to remit a case to the adult court where a juvenile, aged under 18 at the outset of his case, is likely to turn 18 during the course of the proceedings. This is a modification of recommendation 26 from the review of delay in the youth justice system. The necessary legislative changes will be included in the Crime and Disorder Bill.

In addition to these measures, the Crime and Disorder Bill will include legislative provision to give effect to a number of other recommendations from the review of delay in the criminal justice system which apply to both youth and adult proceedings. The Government's response to all the recommendations of the review is set out in a document which has been placed in the Library.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of *(a)* the average cost per case of electronic tagging and *(b)* the costs to the police of dealing with an offender who breaks the terms of the tagging. [12732]

Ms Quin: *(a)* Based on the experience of the first year of the trials of curfew orders with electronic monitoring, the estimated cost per order for a national roll-out was estimated to be about £2,300. Better estimates based on the second year of the trials will be published shortly.

(b) An offender who breaches the terms of the order is returned to court by the electronic monitoring contractors and the police are not involved. However, if an offender then fails to appear in court, a warrant for arrest is issued. Too few such cases have arisen during the current trials of electronic monitoring to enable a meaningful estimate of police costs to be made.

Chief Constables

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by constabulary, the length of service at Association of Chief Police Officers rank prior to their current appointment of each *(a)* chief constable and *(b)* assistant chief constable designated as deputy, indicating for each the date of appointment to their present position. [12354]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is shown in the tables.

	Chief Constable/Commissioner		*Assistant Chief Constable (Designate)/ Deputy Commissioner*	
	Length of ACPO service prior to current appointment (years)	*Date of current appointment*	*Length of ACPO service prior to current appointment (years)*	*Date of current appointment*
Avon and Somerset	12	5 June 1989	2	8 August 1994
Bedfordshire	7	3 January 1996	2	1 January 1996
Cambridgeshire	7	1 January 1994	3	3 May 1994
Cheshire	Vacant	Vacant	1	1 November 1995
City of London	9	4 April 1994	5	1 May 1995
Cleveland	5	5 April 1993	4	12 May 1997
Cumbria	5	1 October 1991	9	1 February 1989
Derbyshire	8	1 June 1990	11	1 October 1996
Devon and Cornwall	9	1 January 1989	5	1 April 1993
Dorset	6	1 January 1995	4	1 January 1995
Durham	10	12 September 1997	7	29 September 1997
Dyfed Powys	5	5 June 1989	7	1 April 1994
Essex	11	1 February 1988	3	1 September 1997
Gloucestershire	6	23 August 1993	3	5 April 1993
Greater Manchester	8	1 July 1991	4	30 September 1991
Gwent	9	1 January 1997	2	5 September 1994
Hampshire	7	1 September 1988	4	28 March 1995
Hertfordshire	6	1 August 1994	6	3 March 1997
Humberside	11	1 January 1992	2	1 September 1997
Kent	9	1 March 1993	5	6 June 1997
Lancashire	3	31 July 1995	7	1 January 1996
Leicestershire	6	16 June 1997	Vacant	Vacant

	Chief Constable/Commissioner		*Assistant Chief Constable (Designate)/ Deputy Commissioner*	
	Length of ACPO service prior to current appointment (years)	*Date of current appointment*	*Length of ACPO service prior to current appointment (years)*	*Date of current appointment*
Lincolnshire	12	29 November 1993	4	14 November 1994
Merseyside	6	25 June 1989	2	1 July 1995
Metropolitan	6	1 January 1993	18	24 April 1995
Norfolk	6	5 July 1993	3	11 February 1992
Northamptonshire	5	2 December 1996	4	1 April 1997
Northumbria	Vacant	Vacant	2	15 October 1993
North Wales	4	31 August 1994	4	2 December 1991
North Yorkshire	9	12 June 1989	1	1 April 1996
Nottinghamshire	9	6 July 1995	1	13 November 1995
South Wales	7	25 November 1996	2	17 December 1996
South Yorkshire	8	1 June 1990	5	26 April 1993
Staffordshire	5	31 March 1996	7	2 September 1996
Suffolk	6	1 May 1989	2	1 September 1994
Surrey	Vacant	Vacant	3	1 August 1994
Sussex	10	1 September 1993	6	1 January 1992
Thames Valley	6	28 January 1991	3	1 July 1997
Warwickshire	7	6 June 1983	2	2 December 1996
West Mercia	5	28 August 1996	2	1 April 1994
West Midlands	12	26 August 1996	6	1 July 1995
West Yorkshire	10	1 February 1993	8	1 April 1996
Wiltshire	6	1 April 1997	6	1 January 1995

Force	*Chief Constable/Commissioner*		*Assistant Chief Constable (designate)/ Deputy Commissioner*	
	Length of ACPO service (years)[1]	*Date of current appointment*	*Length of ACPO service (years)*	*Date of current appointment*
Avon and Somerset	12	5 June 1989	2	8 August 1994
Bedfordshire	7	3 January 1996	2	1 January 1996
Cambridgeshire	7	1 January 1994	3	3 May 1994
Cheshire	Vacant	Vacant	1	1 November 1995
City of London	9	4 April 1994	5	1 May 1995
Cleveland	5	5 April 1993	4	12 May 1997
Cumbria	5	1 October 1991	9	1 February 1989
Derbyshire	8	1 June 1990	11	1 October 1996
Devon and Cornwall	9	1 January 1989	5	1 April 1993
Dorset	6	1 January 1995	4	1 January 1995
Durham	10	12 September 1997	7	29 September 1997
Dyfed Powys	5	5 June 1989	7	1 April 1994
Essex	11	1 February 1988	3	1 September 1997
Gloucestershire	6	23 August 1993	3	5 April 1993
Greater Manchester	8	1 July 1991	4	30 September 1991
Gwent	9	1 January 1997	2	5 September 1994
Hampshire	7	1 September 1988	4	28 March 1995
Hertfordshire	6	1 August 1994	6	3 March 1997
Humberside	11	1 January 1992	2	1 September 1997
Kent	9	1 March 1993	5	6 June 1997
Lancashire	3	31 July 1995	7	1 January 1996
Leicestershire	6	16 June 1997	Vacant	Vacant
Lincolnshire	12	29 November 1993	4	14 November 1994
Merseyside	6	25 June 1989	2	1 May 1995
Metropolitan	6	1 February 1993	18	24 April 1995
Norfolk	6	5 July 1993	3	11 February 1992
Northamptonshire	5	2 December 1996	4	1 April 1997
Northumbria	Vacant	Vacant	2	15 October 1993
North Wales	4	31 August 1994	4	2 December 1991
North Yorkshire	9	12 June 1989	1	1 April 1996
Nottinghamshire	9	6 July 1995	1	13 November 1995
South Wales	7	25 November 1996	2	17 December 1996
South Yorkshire	8	1 June 1990	5	26 April 1993
Staffordshire	5	31 March 1996	7	2 September 1996
Suffolk	6	1 May 1989	2	1 September 1994
Surrey	Vacant	Vacant	3	1 August 1994
Sussex	10	1 September 1993	6	1 January 1992
Thames Valley	6	28 January 1991	3	1 July 1997
Warwickshire	7	6 June 1983	2	2 December 1996
West Mercia	5	28 August 1996	2	1 April 1994
West Midlands	12	26 August 1996	6	1 July 1995
West Yorkshire	10	1 February 1993	8	1 April 1996
Wiltshire	6	1 April 1997	6	1 January 1995

[1] Prior to current appointment.

Prisoners (Release)

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners not excluded by paragraph 2.3 of IG 36/95 have left prison since April 1995 without resettlement leave having been granted. [13055]

Ms Quin: The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be made available only at disproportionate cost by an examination of individual prisoner records.

Prisons (Psychiatric Services)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of doctors currently working in the Prison Service are qualified in psychiatry; and what plans he has to increase the numbers qualified. [13197]

Ms Quin: Twenty-one out of 197 doctors employed by the Prison Service are either members of the Royal College of Psychiatrists or holders of the diploma in psychiatric medicine. In addition, visiting specialists from the national health service provide the Prison Service with specialist psychiatric services.

The Prison Service, in conjunction with Nottingham university, introduced the diploma in prison medicine in October 1996. The aim of the diploma is to support the professional development of prison doctors. It has a significant psychiatric component which should be helpful to those doctors who are not specifically qualified in psychiatry.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in England and Wales are currently awaiting transfer to NHS psychiatric hospitals; and what is the average waiting time for such a transfer. [13195]

Ms Quin: On 28 October 1997, 49 prisoners—25 sentenced and 24 unsentenced—were awaiting transfer to a national health service psychiatric hospital. The average time taken in 1996 between receipt in the Home Office of an application for transfer, which includes the two medical reports required under the Mental Health Act 1983, and the issue of a warrant authorising transfer to hospital, was eight days in the case of unsentenced prisoners and 16 days for sentenced prisoners.

Only in very exceptional circumstances would transfer not take place within 14 days of the issue of a warrant.

European Convention on Human Rights

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has conducted and with whom concerning the most effective manner of incorporating the European convention on human rights into United Kingdom statute law. [13556]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 31 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *567*.

Identity Cards

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the advantages of introducing identity cards to assist the prohibition of the sale of *(a)* cigarettes, *(b)* alcohol and *(c)* solvents and other volatile substances to those under age. [13131]

Mr. George Howarth: We are considering the options but have yet to decide whether identity cards should be introduced in the United Kingdom. The issues go far wider than proof of age for purchases. However, the fact that an identity card scheme could help to prevent the sale of age-restricted goods such as tobacco, alcohol and solvents to youngsters is one of the potential benefits which will be taken into account.

Fire Safety

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list his Department's priorities in relation to fire safety for the United Kingdom presidency of the EU. [12983]

Mr. George Howarth: We do not propose any initiative relating to fire safety specifically as a result of the United Kingdom presidency of the European Union. However, on the domestic front, as I announced in a reply to a question from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on 23 June, *Official Report*, column *360*, we are developing proposals to consolidate and rationalise our fire safety legislation. We hope shortly to publish a consultative document setting out our proposals.

Fire Service

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the financial difficulties facing the London fire service and on his response to it. [13224]

Mr. George Howarth: I have received representations from the London fire and civil defence authority about expected future funding difficulties. The revenue provision for the authority in 1998–99 will be announced in the coming weeks as part of the provisional local government settlement for England. I understand that the authority is making a number of proposals for reductions in firefighting resources. Before these could be implemented, they would require the approval of my right hon. Friend under the provisions of section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will set out the calculations by which a fire service in a C risk category area must meet its attendance time requirement of eight to 10 minutes under Home Office standards; [13485]

(2) if, when a fire service in a C risk category area is moved from round-the-clock cover to a retained basis, it is still expected to meet its attendance time target of eight to 10 minutes; and what the revised time calculations are; [13481]

(3) what action is taken if a fire service in a C risk category area does not meet its eight to 10 minute attendance time standard. [13487]

Mr. George Howarth: Statutory responsibility for the provision of a fire service to meet efficiently all normal requirements rests locally with the fire authority. In performance of their duties, fire authorities have regard to the national standards of fire cover, which have been endorsed by the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council and are recommended by the Home Secretary.

The national standards set out for fires in each category of fire risk the recommended minimum number of firefighting appliances which should attend within predetermined times. The recommended response is the same whatever time of day an incident takes place. In conducting reviews of fire risk, brigades carry out timed runs, making assumptions about the time it will take for a fire appliance to reach a given point in accordance with local traffic conditions. Such evidence will also be supported by an examination of actual attendance times.

The national standards are not statutory and they do allow for the possibility of brigades not meeting the recommended response time for every fire call, for example in circumstances where a number of simultaneous incidents occur. For each response to a fire call, brigades record the time from the despatch of the applicant to arrival at the incident and it is the practice to investigate the reasons if in the case the national recommended response times have not been met.

Each brigade is inspected annually by Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services to monitor, among other things, whether the national recommended standards are in general being maintained.

The overall performance of brigades in meeting the recommended response times is also monitored by the Audit Commission, which publishes the results of its findings. The Audit Commission said earlier this year that the fire service was one of the most consistently high performing services in local government.

A fire authority may not change the staffing of a fire station from whole-time to day-crewed or retained without the approval of the Home Secretary under section 19(4) of the Fire Services Act 1947. He will approve only if he is satisfied that the fire authority has consulted about its proposals and, on the advice of Her Majesty's inspectorate, that the national standards will continue to be maintained.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out the pension arrangements for firemen in the London area. [13486]

Mr. George Howarth: Regular firefighters in London, as elsewhere in England and Wales, are members of the firemen's pension scheme, the current provisions of which are set out in the Firemen's Pension Scheme Order 1992, as amended.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimates he had made of the forward cost of pensions for firemen retiring in the London area; and what assessment he has made of the impact of that cost on the provision of fire services. [13480]

Mr. George Howarth: In reaching its decisions on the provisional local government settlement for 1998–99, the Government will have regard to the pressures on the fire service, as on other local authority services. These pressures include the increasing pension commitments of fire authorities.

The Government take into account both estimates of future pensions expenditure provided by the Local Government Association and detailed projections of net pensions expenditure provided by the Government Actuary's Department. For London, they also have estimates of future pensions expenditure provided by the London fire and civil defence authority.

Immigration

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest position regarding restoring a right of appeal for those refused entry clearance for visiting the United Kingdom. [13200]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our manifesto commits us to providing a streamlined system of appeals for visitors denied a visa. We are examining the options for doing this.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in relation to the concessionary arrangements outside the immigration rules of 13 October; if he will define a relationship akin to marriage with a person of either sex, and specify the criteria to be used to establish such a relationship. [13348]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A relationship akin to marriage is one which is similar in its nature to a marriage in that it involves a committed relationship which can be demonstrated by evidence such as joint commitments, financial or otherwise. In order to benefit under the new concession, an unmarried couple will need to demonstrate, among other matters, that they are legally unable to marry; that they have been living together for four years or more; that they intend to live together permanently; that any previous marriage or similar relationship has permanently broken down and that they will be able to maintain and accommodate themselves without recourse to public funds.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of the current serving prison population lacks entry clearance certificates; [13343]

(2) how many persons were convicted of or pleaded guilty to indictable offences who lacked entry clearance certificates; how many of these were recommended for deportation by the courts; and how many have been deported in each of the last four years. [13341]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I regret that the information is not held on the relevant computer databases but the great majority of prisoners will not have entry clearance certificates and do not require them.

Police Constables

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police constables were in post *(a)* in May 1992 and *(b)* in May 1997. [13318]

Mr. Michael: At the end of April 1992, there were 95,810 constables in England and Wales. By the end of March 1997, the latest date for which figures are available, this had increased by 2,322 to 98,132. Between March 1996 and March 1997, overall police numbers fell by 469 to 127,158.

Licensing Hours

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received to allow extensions of licensing hours where the provision of liquor is ancillary to performances of live music. [13311]

Mr. George Howarth: Licensing law already provides for extensions of licensing hours as an ancillary to live music. We are considering representations received from the restaurant and entertainments industries to relax some of the restrictions on the grant of such extensions.

Surveillance Systems

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many chief officer authorisations by *(a)* the police, and *(b)* HM Customs and Excise and *(c)* both, of intrusive surveillance operations were made which affected Sussex for the most recent year for which figures are available. [13355]

Mr. Michael: Figures on the total number of authorisations of intrusive surveillance operations are not collected centrally but a review undertaken to inform parliamentary debate of part III of the Police Act 1997 estimated that there were around 2,550 chief officer authorisations by police and Customs in the United Kingdom in 1996.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will amend the terms of the Interception of Communications Act 1985 to cover interception of telephone communication other than by a physical tap. [13223]

Mr. Straw: The Interception of Communications Act 1985 applies to the intentional interception of communications in the course of their transmission by means of a public telecommunications system however the interception is effected. It is not therefore necessary to consider an amendment of the kind proposed by my hon. Friend.

Deportation

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his policy in relation to deportation is the same for those aged under 60 years as it is for those aged over 60 years. [13347]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The age of 60 is not of itself significant. Each case is considered on its individual merits. This means that all relevant factors, including the age of the person, will be taken into account when deciding whether deportation is appropriate. The general policy of the previous Government was not to remove those aged 65 or more. I am examining all aspects of this issue as part of our general review of immigration and asylum policy.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum appeals are currently outstanding. [13344]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As at 30 September 1997, an estimated 26,500 asylum appeals, excluding dependants, were awaiting determination.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of persons who have sought asylum in the United Kingdom in the last five years, and give the proportion whose whereabouts are known to the authorities. [13349]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: During the period 1 January 1993 to 30 September 1997, approximately 153,000 asylum applications, excluding dependants, were lodged in the United Kingdom. I regret that the other information requested is not available.

Prison Population

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the prison population has been in each of the last six months. [13342]

Ms Quin: The information requested is given in the table.

Population in prisons in England and Wales on the last day of the month, April to September 1997

On last day of month	*Number*
April	60,131
May	60,335
June	61,467
July	62,324
August	61,940
September	62,652

Mr. Shayler

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which friends and associates of Mr. Shayler were questioned by the police; when the questioning occurred; and what were the reasons for it. [13424]

Mr. Straw: This investigation is a matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. I understand from the commissioner that inquiries are proceeding and the Metropolitan police will report in the normal way to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy that Mr. Shayler will be arrested if he returns to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [13527]

Mr. Straw: This is not a matter for me but for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. I understand from the commissioner that the Metropolitan police would like to interview Mr. Shayler in connection with a possible offence under section 1 of the Official Secrets Act 1989.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

International Whaling Commission

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the members of the British delegation to the annual meeting of the International

Whaling Commission, and identify *(a)* their qualifications, *(b)* their other paid or voluntary employment and *(c)* their other current appointments. [12929]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The members of the official UK delegation to the International Whaling Commission and current appointments were as follows:

Mr. C. I. Llewelyn: (UK Commissioner, MAFF, Fisheries Division II)

Mr. R. W. Bowman: (Alternate Commissioner, MAFF, Fisheries Division II)

Mrs. F. A. Walters: (MAFF, Fisheries Division II)

Miss S. Jeyabalan: (MAFF, Fisheries Division II)

Dr. J. T. Addison: (MAFF, Fisheries Scientist (CEFAS))

Mr. I. G. Muchmore: (DETR, Global Wildlife Division)

Mr. M. G. Whatley: (FCO, Environment, Science and Energy Department)

Professor P. W. Birnie: (Visiting Fellow at London School of Economics)

Ms H. McLachlan: (Senior Scientific Officer, RSPCA)

Mr. C. Stroud: (Campaigns Director, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society).

None had other paid or voluntary employment.

The following also acted at technical advisers to the UK delegation at the humane killing working group:

Mr. K. Meldrum: (former Chief Veterinary Officer, MAFF)

Mr. M. Cooke: (Veterinary Adviser)

Mr. W. Swann: (Head of Veterinary Department, RSPCA).

For reasons of confidentiality I am unable to provide further details of qualifications or other paid or voluntary employment.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to encourage the International Whaling Commission to ban the use of the electric lance at its annual meeting; and if he will make a statement. [12928]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) on 28 October 1997, *Official Report,* columns 789–92.

Chocolate Directive

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Ministry plans to *(a)* support the European Commission's draft chocolate directive, *(b)* oppose the European Parliament's amendments to the draft directive and *(c)* make a statement about the Government's policy on the draft directive. [13350]

Mr. Rooker: The Government broadly support the European Commission's proposals on chocolate and are opposed to a number of the amendments proposed by the European Parliament, particularly those which would have the effect of discriminating against chocolate containing small additions of vegetable fat and against high-quality UK "milk chocolate". As my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced on 23 October, the Government will continue to press strongly for a new directive which protects names traditionally used in the UK and resist measures which would mislead consumers and unfairly penalise our chocolate industry.

Hunt Kennels

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assess the extra costs which will fall on farmers from the closure of hunt kennels; and if he will make a statement. [13209]

Mr. Rooker: MAFF figures are not available. The private Member's Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) is due to receive its Second Reading on 28 November. The Government's stance is neither to support nor to oppose a ban on hunting but to allow a free vote. The Bill will provide Parliament with an opportunity to study the pros and cons of any ban on hunting, including the ramifications on the service offered by hunt kennels to the farming community.

Thames (Flooding)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports he has received from the Environment Agency into the potential flooding dangers posed to areas abutting the Thames estuary, east of the Thames barrier, consequent upon the increase of sea levels and dangers of surge tides; and if he will make a statement. [13215]

Mr. Morley: The Department has not received any specific reports from the Environment Agency.

Food Safety

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is his Department's policy to separate risk assessment and risk management in matters of food safety. [13184]

Mr. Rooker: The process of risk analysis, which comprises risk assessment, risk management and the third component of risk communication, is, in the case of food safety, the joint responsibility of my Ministry and the Department of Health. In general we seek to ensure that risk assessment and risk management are considered separately, although they do also have a measure of interdependence, as has been made clear in recent expert FAO/WHO consultations on risk analysis and risk management. Officials in the joint MAFF/DH food safety and standards group are, however, studying current procedures in the light of recent developments in thinking to ensure that best practice is being followed.

Late Payments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the suppliers to his Department who are owed outstanding amounts, indicating the amounts and the due date on which the account should have been settled. [13545]

Mr. Rooker: All Departments are required to pay all their bills within agreed contract terms, or 30 days from receipt of the goods or service or a valid invoice, whichever is later, where no such terms exist. Such detailed information on payment performance for the current financial year could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Treasury will shortly be publishing a league table of departmental payment performance for 1996–97.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Six-month Entry Visas

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many six-month entry visas to the United Kingdom were granted in each of the last two years for which statistics are available. [12575]

Mr. Fatchett: The majority of visas for the UK are valid for presentation at a port within six months of date of issue. In the last two years for which statistics are available, entry clearance posts issued the following:

	1995	*1996*
Total number issued	1,076,531	1,273,156
Number of non-settlement	1,042,667	1,240,341
Number of multiple entry visas valid for presentation within six months	168,711	221,001

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which his Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12560]

Mr. Fatchett: This Department makes payments both in the United Kingdom and through embassies and high commissions overseas. No sub-contractors are involved. We also make a large number of payments overseas on behalf of other Government Departments.

In the United Kingdom, spending Departments input the invoice details electronically, but actual payment is issued centrally. During 1996–97, 33,517 payments—covering one or more invoice—were issued at a cost of £124,533 in central staff costs.

No figures are available for payments made overseas and to obtain the information required would involve disproportionate cost.

Argentina

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new exceptions to the arms embargo on Argentina there have been since 1 May. [13766]

Mr. Fatchett: We have recently approved the export of a single sporting rifle to Argentina following its repair by the original manufacturer in the UK. This is an exception, but not a change, to the embargo.

Rwanda

Mr. Charles Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will notify his decision on licensing the export of armoured Land Rover vehicles to the UN High Commission for Refugees in Rwanda. [13902]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has recommended approval of an export licence for this item, which has been issued by the Department of Trade and Industry. UN Security Council resolution 1011 prohibits the export of military goods to non-governmental agents in Rwanda. However, the UN secretariat has confirmed that this embargo does not cover the export of equipment destined for UN operations. This export follows similar exemptions made for UNHCR in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the approval of an export licence for the supply of riot shields to the United States army in Bosnia and Herzegovina. [13850]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We recently approved the export of 340 riot shields of UK manufacture to the US Army for use in Bosnia to protect US SFOR troops. Given the tension in Bosnia around the time of the municipal elections on 13 to 14 September, we were glad to be able to approve this export as an exception to the EU common position on arms exports to the former Yugoslavia. This decision does not affect the Government's continued support of the EU common position.

Late Payments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the suppliers to his Department who are owed outstanding amounts, indicating the amounts and the due date on which the account should have been settled. [13550]

Mr. Fatchett: All Departments are required to pay all their bills within agreed contract terms, or 30 days from receipt of the goods or service or a valid invoice, whichever is later, where no such terms exist. Such detailed information on payment performance for the current financial year could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Treasury will shortly be publishing a league table of departmental payment performance for 1996–97.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioner Savings

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the mean and median level of savings held by pensioners aged *(a)* 60 to 64 years, *(b)* 65 to 69 years, *(c)* 70 to 74 years, *(d)* 75 to 79 years and *(e)* 80 years and over (i) in total and (ii) for (1) single male pensioners, (2) singe female pensioners and (3) married pensioners. [12824]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the following tables.

Capital holdings of all pensioners

Percentage

			Age			
	60 to 64	*65 to 69*	*70 to 74*	*75 to 79*	*80 +*	*Total*
None	41	27	26	28	31	29
<£1,500	15	13	14	15	15	14
£1,500 to £3,000	4	8	9	11	12	9
£3,000 to £8,000	13	12	14	14	15	14
£8,000 to £10,000	4	3	4	3	3	3
£10,000 to £16,000	7	7	7	7	5	6
£16,000 to 20,000	3	3	3	4	3	3
£20,000 or more	12	27	23	19	17	21

Source:
Family resources survey 1995–96.

Capital holdings of single male pensioners

Percentage

		Age			
	65 to 69	*70 to 74*	*75 to 79*	*80+*	*Total*
None	35	33	32	29	32
<£1,500	12	10	15	15	13
£1,500 to £3,000	10	10	9	11	10
£3,000 to £8,000	10	16	14	15	14
£8,000 to £10,000	2	3	2	4	3
£10,000 to £16,000	6	7	9	4	6
£16,000 to £20,000	2	3	3	3	3
£20,000 or more	23	18	16	19	19

Source:
Family resources survey 1995–96.

Capital holdings of single female pensioners

			Age			
	60 to 64	*65 to 69*	*70 to 74*	*75 to 79*	*80 +*	*Total*
None	41	37	33	33	36	35
< £1,500	15	15	17	18	16	17
£1,500 to £3,000	4	7	9	12	13	10
£3,000 to £8,000	13	15	13	14	14	14
£8,000 to £10,000	4	5	4	4	3	4
£10,000 to £16,000	7	5	6	6	4	5
£16,000 to £20,000	3	3	3	2	2	3
£20,000 or more	12	13	15	12	12	13

Source:
Family resources survey 1995–96.

Capital holdings of pensioner couples

			Age		
	65 to 69	*70 to 74*	*75 to 79*	*80+*	*Total*
None	21	17	19	21	19
<£1,500	13	13	10	10	12
£1,500 to £3,000	7	9	11	10	9
£3,000 to £8,000	11	14	15	15	13
£8,000 to £10,000	3	4	4	3	3
£10,000 to £16,000	7	9	9	8	8
£16,000 to £20,000	4	3	5	5	4
£20,000 or more	35	31	29	28	32

Source:
Family resources survey 1995–96.

Independent Tribunal Service

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will review the operation of the independent tribunal service in order to reduce waiting times. [12762]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Social Security Bill, which will be debated in Committee from 28 October, contains measures to provide a more efficient and faster appeals system for social security benefits, child support and vaccine damage payments. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said that she will take personal responsibility for the administration of the new system and will set and publish demanding targets for clearing appeals and report on the results achieved.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of gross rents in *(a)* the private rented, *(b)* local authority and *(c)* the housing association sectors is met by housing benefit. [12817]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is in the table.

Proportion of total rental income covered by housing benefit Great Britain 1995–96

Private rented sector	*Local Authority sector*	*Housing association sector*
38 per cent.	58 per cent.	53 per cent.

Note:

The information is based on housing benefit expenditure in Great Britain as a proportion of estimated total rental income in each sector, including tenants not in receipt of any housing benefit.

Source:

Figures based on the 1995–96 family resources survey. The number of housing benefit recipients has been calibrated to match 1995–96 local authority case load counts.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the effect on the number of recipients of housing benefit of cutting the taper to *(a)* 60 per cent., *(b)* 55 per cent. and *(c)* 50 per cent. [12815]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is in the table.

Estimated effect on case load of reducing the housing benefit taper

Taper (per cent.)	*Housing benefit case load*	*Increase on current case load*
Current taper 65	4,700,000	—
60	4,725,000	25,000
55	4,770,000	70,000
50	4,825,000	125,000

1. Estimates obtained from policy simulation model based on the 1995–96 family resources survey uprated to 1997–98 case load levels.

2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5,000.

Mr. Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she plans to publish the Social Security Advisory Committee's 1996 report on proposed amendments to the housing benefit regulations governing service charge eligibility; and if she will make a statement. [14186]

Ms Harman: The committee's report was published today. It provides valuable insight into the interaction of the various funding streams in supported housing. It is vital that such an important document is in the public domain to feed into the group's discussions on long-term funding arrangements.

The inter-departmental group is seeking to implement a sustainable long-term funding arrangement for this valuable social provision. The work of the inter-departmental group is unlikely to conclude this year. We inherited a situation whereby many people relied on a benefit designed to meet housing costs to meet charges for services which bear little relation to the provision of accommodation. A recent divisional court ruling has confirmed that this is clearly an unsatisfactory arrangement. We have introduced interim measures to protect the many thousands of vulnerable people living in supported accommodation and stabilise the position of existing supported housing provision until such time as we can implement a sustainable long-term funding arrangement. We shall shortly announce our objectives for these arrangements and we shall be seeking the views of stakeholders on how best to translate them into a modern, practical and sustainable funding mechanism.

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assumptions about the take-up of means-tested benefits underlie *(a)* the most recent departmental spending plans and *(b)* the previous year's spending plans; and if she will make a statement. [12820]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Department's estimates of expenditure on means-tested benefits do not make any assumptions about the level of take-up. Estimates are based on information drawn from the administrative data sets for individual benefits and reflect the level of take-up that exists at the time the data are collected.

Notes:

1. Further information can be found in the Department's "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up" publications. A copy of the newly published 1995–96 report is available the Library.

2. The expenditure forecasts assume that recent trends, including trends in take-up rates, continue into the future. There has been no change in the relevant methodology between the latest plans and the previous year's plans.

Lone Parents

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many lone parents in receipt of income support have a youngest child below school age; and what proportion this represents of all lone parents on income support. [12821]

Mr. Keith Bradley: As at November 1996 there were 517,000 lone parents with a youngest child below school age. This figure represents 50.5 per cent. of all lone parents on income support.

Notes:

1. Below school age is defined as under five years of age.

2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand and percentages to one decimal place.

3. Lone parents are those receiving the lone parent premium.

4. Sample size 5 per cent.

Source:

Income support statistics quarterly inquiry, November 1996.

Social Security Advisory Committee

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she will respond to the eleventh report from the Social Security Advisory Committee, published on 5 August; and if she will make a statement on the future role and membership of the committee. [12787]

Mr. Field: The eleventh report of the Social Security Advisory Committee gave an account of the committee's work since November 1995 and no response was required. The committee is an independent statutory body whose role and membership criteria are set out in the Social Security Administration Act 1992. There are no plans to amend the legislation.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will assess the appropriateness of using weather stations in *(a)* Bradford and *(b)* Manchester airport to determine cold weather payments in High Peak. [12758]

Mr. Denham: Entitlement to cold weather payments is based on either the recorded or forecast temperature data at one of 72 weather stations throughout Great Britain. Each weather station is considered to reflect fairly the temperatures of the area it covers. Postcode districts are linked to weather stations, taking into account expert advice from the Meteorological Office.

The list of weather stations to be used this winter and their respective linked postcode districts are contained within the amending regulations which were laid on 9 October, S.I. 1997 No. 2311. The weather stations at Bingley and Ringway—Manchester airport—will continue to be used for postcode districts in the High Peak constituency.

After the end of each winter, representations made regarding the suitability of individual weather stations or their respective links with individual postcode districts are reviewed. Expert advice is sought from the Meteorological Office.

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she expects to announce the outcome of the annual review of the cold weather payments and if she will make a statement. [14188]

Mr. Denham: The annual review has taken place against a backdrop of successful Government moves to cut fuel costs and a wide-ranging programme to make homes easier to heat. The Government are determined to tackle the problems associated with vulnerable people keeping warm during cold weather. Action will go well beyond the scope of cold weather payments.

Fuel costs for many of the poorest claimants are falling. The annual fuel bills for people eligible for CWPs are estimated to be £60 million less this year than last. This fall itself is equivalent to nearly three CWPs. Last year eligible people received an average of two payments.

This winter, fuel bills will fall due to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's reduction in VAT on fuel bills from eight to 5 per cent., removal of the gas levy, and recent reductions in the cost of fuel and light.

Help with energy efficiency grants will continue for householders on low income benefits, disability allowances, or who are aged 60 or over. A further 400,000 vulnerable households will receive help this year. The grants have been extended to cover two new main measures—cavity wall insulation and upgrading of heating system controls.

The environmental task force element of the Government's welfare-to-work new deal is now taking shape. It is expected to include a programme of energy efficiency improvements in homes of the elderly.

This year's review also concluded that two further changes could not be implemented without increasing the complexity and uncertainty of the scheme and would not have provided a guaranteed improvement in the perceived fairness of the scheme.

The first proposed change made use of a new product from the Meteorological Office, which would have removed the need for an annual review of post code to weather station links, but would have lead to the number of post code groups within Great Britain increasing from the present 70 to over 600. Increasing the number of areas would have created far more occasions when people in neighbouring streets received a different number of payments and made the scheme far more difficult to understand. Therefore, we decided not to introduce this change, but to keep the current arrangements under review.

We also considered a new report commissioned from the Building Research Establishment into the effect of wind speed on domestic heating needs during very cold weather. Copies of the BRE report have been placed in the Library. The report was considered alongside the action the Government have already taken to cut fuel bills and promote energy efficiency. We were also mindful of our manifesto commitment to live within inherited expenditure plans.

Allowing for the effects of wind speed would increase the complexity and uncertainty of the scheme without ensuring that the payments went to those with the greatest need for additional heating. The amount of additional heating required depends on a number of varying factors, including the house type, insulation standard, method of heating used and its efficiency.

If the current level of expenditure was maintained, but the scheme was changed to take into account wind speed, it is highly likely that many people in less windy areas would lose payments which they could expect to receive under the current arrangements.

Taking into account all the relevant considerations we have decided not to amend the scheme to take account of wind speed.

The annual review of the CWP scheme has now been completed. The review involved consideration of representations made during last winter regarding the suitability of individual weather stations or their respective links with post code districts. Amending regulations were laid on 9 October.

In line with the Meterological Office expert advice, we have increased the number of weather stations used in the scheme from 70—the number used last winter—to 72. The two additional weather stations will improve the fairness with which payments are made in the affected areas. The two additional weather stations will be in Scotland. One at Waterstein head will represent most of the Isle of Skye and the other at Salsburgh will represent some inland areas in the south of Scotland.

Income Support Mortgage Interest Scheme

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to change the way that standard interest rate used in the income support mortgage interest scheme is calculated. [14184]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We have no current plans to change the existing arrangements for calculating the standard interest rate.

Late Payments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the suppliers to her Department who are owed outstanding amounts, indicating the amounts and the due date on which the account should have been settled. [13540]

Mr. Field: All Departments are required to pay all their bills within agreed contract terms, or 30 days from receipt of the goods or service or a valid invoice, whichever is later, where no such terms exist. Such detailed information on payment performance for the current financial year could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Treasury will shortly be publishing a league table of departmental payment performance for 1996–97.

PRIME MINSTER

Computers (Century Date Change)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Prime Minster what proposals he has to address the century date change problem relating to computer systems during the British presidency of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [13151]

The Prime Minister: The Government have launched Action 2000, a new initiative to provide UK businesses with the help that they need to tackle the century date change problem.

We intend to raise with colleagues in Europe the need for all Governments to address this issue urgently.

Ministers (Conflict of Interest)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the responsibility of the President of the Board of Trade for ensuring that her Ministers do not see papers or attend meetings which may cause them to have a conflict of interest. [12463]

The Prime Minister: In accordance with the ministerial code, all Ministers have an individual responsibility for ensuring that they do not see papers or attend meetings which may cause them to have a conflict of interest

WPC Yvonne Fletcher

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the Adjournment debate of 23 July, *Official Report*, columns *994–1022*, if following the meeting between Assistant Commissioner David Veness and the hon. Member for Linlithgow in Scotland Yard on 10 July, concerning the murder of WPC Yvonne Fletcher, he will reconsider Her Majesty's Government's policy towards UN sanctions against Libya. [12539]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, on 30 June, *Official Report*, column *38*.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the Adjournment debate of 23 July, *Official Report*, columns 994–1022, if he will set out what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to consider circumstances which have come to light since the fatal accident inquiry on the destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie; and the application of UN sanctions against Libya. [12538]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* Any new information is scrutinised carefully. The Lockerbie investigation remains open and its work is kept under constant review. The Lord Advocate has stated that he is satisfied, on the information available to him, that there is no reason not to proceed with the petitions against the Libyans accused of the Lockerbie bombing. Until Libya complies with the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, sanctions should be maintained.

Written Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he or his Ministers had with the hon. Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) prior to the tabling of the question by the hon. Member for answer by the Prime Minister on 31 July; and what was the purpose of such discussion. [12735]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* As far as I am aware, none.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) of 31 July, *Official Report*, column *495*, and the answer by the Chancellor of the Exchequer of 21 July, *Official Report*, column *442*, what was the basis of the calculation in the answer of 31 July. [12736]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The average cost of answering a written parliamentary question is £107.

The average cost was multiplied by the number of questions the hon. Member had tabled, 295, to give an estimated total cost of £30,000 since the beginning of May.

The cost detailed on 21 July, *Official Report*, column *442*, applies to direct staff costs only.

Chequers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* official entertainment functions and *(b)* conferences which have been held at Chequers since May. [12919]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* Since the general election, my family and I have used Chequers in a variety of ways, both official and private, consistent with the wishes of the donor, Lord Lee, and the Chequers Estate Acts.

Social Exclusion Unit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Prime Minister what are the terms of reference of the social exclusion unit; how many full-time equivalent staff it will have; and what estimate he has made of its annual running cost. [12825]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The full membership of the unit and its precise terms of reference will be announced shortly. Its budget is currently being determined, but will be funded from within existing resources.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's definition of social exclusion. [12827]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* Social exclusion can be broadly defined as covering those people who do not have the means, material and otherwise, to participate in social, economic, political and cultural life.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Prime Minister how he will assess whether social exclusion has decreased as a result of the work of the social exclusion unit. [12826]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The social exclusion unit will have clear public terms of reference, against which its work can be judged.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the number of people experiencing social exclusion at present; and what are the principal causes of that social exclusion. [12828]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* One of the social exclusion unit's key tasks will be to draw together information on the key indicators of social exclusion and improve understanding of its causes.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister what has been the cost to public funds of official secretarial support to unpaid advisers; and from what source these sums are met. [12524]

The Prime Minister: Unpaid special advisers may have access to departmental typing facilities. In practice, only one unpaid adviser currently has requested access to typing facilities and this is being provided from a shared resource with other special advisers. It is not possible to distinguish the precise cost to departmental resources of this support to the unpaid adviser.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, columns *556–57*, if Ministers with unpaid advisers have procured a list of private concerns for each relevant adviser and a list of issues on which conflict with those concerns may arise. [12520]

The Prime Minister: Yes. Ministers and their unpaid advisers are required before any appointment is confirmed to ensure that no conflict arises, or appears to arise, between their public duties and of their private interests.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister if the notification of the Prime Minister prior to appointments of unpaid advisers constitutes approval by the Prime Minister of each appointment. [12521]

The Prime Minister: Before agreeing to the appointment of an unpaid adviser, the appointing Minister has to satisfy me that the appointment is necessary, and that arrangements have been put in place to ensure that no conflict arises, or appears to arise, between their public duties and any of their private interests.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if unpaid advisers have been or may be subject to positive vetting; and who pays for the vetting; [12522]

(2) if a ministerial instruction is needed in each case before an unpaid adviser may see classified papers; and if unpaid advisers who have not been positively vetted are permitted to see papers normally seen only by officials and advisers who have been positively vetted. [12523]

The Prime Minister: It is for the appointing Minister to determine the papers to which an unpaid adviser may have access. If this involves access to classified papers, then the adviser will be subject to appropriate vetting clearance, the cost of which will be met from the relevant departmental budget.

Special Advisers

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the special advisers in his Department and indicate the subjects on which they advise. [12330]

The Prime Minister: The special advisers in No. 10 Downing street and their responsibilities are as follows:

	Responsibility
Jonathan Powell	Chief of Staff
Kate Garvey	Diary
Anji Hunter	Planning and Visits
Fiona Miller (part time)	Assistants to Mrs. Blair
Roz Preston (part time)	
No. 10 Policy Unit	
David Milliband	Director of Policy, Education
Derek Scott	Economy
James Purnell	Culture, Media and Sport and Office of Public Service
Robert Hill	Health and Local Government
Liz Lloyd	Agriculture, Environment and Home Affairs
Pat McFadden	Constitutional Reform
Geoffrey Norris	Trade and Industry, Transport and Regional Policy
Roger Liddle	Europe, Defence
Peter Hyman	Communications
Geoff Mulgan	Social Exclusion
No. 10 Press Office	
Alastair Campbell	Press Secretary
Tim Allan	No. 10 Press Office
Hillary Coffman	No. 10 Press Office

Security Service

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what files on individuals held by the Security Service were brought into the public domain as a result of the statement made by Mr. Shayler; and if he will make a statement. [13356]

The Prime Minister: No files have been released into the public domain as a result of Mr. Shayler's statements to the press.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the prime Minister if Mr. Shayler is to be allowed to give evidence to the Intelligence and Security Committee. [13425]

The Prime Minister: This is a matter for the Committee itself to decide.

Telephone Tapping

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if it is Govnerment policy that interception of telephones of hon. Members by the Security Service requires his authorisation; and if he will make a statement. [13358]

The Prime Minister: This Government's policy on the interception of telephones of Members of Parliament remains as stated in 1966 by the then Prime Minister, the Lord Wilson of Rievaulx, and as applied by successive Governments since. In answer to questions on 17 November 1966, Lord Wilson said that he had given instructions that there was to be no tapping of the telephones of Members of Parliament and that, if there were a development which required such a change of policy, he would at such moment as seemed compatible with the security of the country, on his own initiative, make a statement in the House about it.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Edinburgh. [13003]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the Statement I made in the House, *Official Report*, columns 707–709.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Grace and Favour Residences

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, which Officers of the House enjoy grace and favour residences; and what is *(a)* their rateable value, *(b)* their market rent, *(c)* the rent actually paid and *(d)* the total amount of public funds spent on renovation of each property over the past 10 years. [12457]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 31 July 1997]:* There are no grace and favour residences in the parliamentary precincts. However, certain Officers of the House are required to reside in the precincts when the House is in session. It is not the practice to give details of the conditions of service of individual staff.

Expenditure on the refurbishment of the residences since 1 April 1993 has totalled £169,000. Figures for earlier years are not available.

HEALTH

Childbirth Costs

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average cost of childbirth in the NHS in England and Wales including ante-natal and post-natal care for each of the last five years. [12956]

Mr. Boateng: The average cost of childbirth in the national health service in England, including ante-natal and post-natal care provided both in hospitals and the community, is shown in the attached table. Questions relating to Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Total expenditure on maternity services (hospital and community)—in £000s	1,011,857	1,007,065	1,006,546	1,012,530	[1]1,048,651
	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Total numbers of births (livebirths and stillbirths)	654,561	640,094	632,539	616,663	617,529
Average cost per birth	£1,546	£1,573	£1,591	£1,642	£1,698

Note:

[1] Provisional.

Sources:

Office of National Statistics, Key Population and Vital Statistics 1992, 1993, 1994, VS5 Tables 1995, 1996.

Annual financial returns of health authority directly managed units and NHS trusts.

Hospital Appointment Cancellations

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue guidance to health authorities and NHS trusts on methods to reduce cancellations by hospital outpatients, with specific reference to the use of post and phone reminder systems. [12810]

Mr. Boateng: Best practice guidance, including the issuing of reminder letters and the use of freephones and answer-phones, to reduce non-attendance in outpatients clinics was issued by the NHS executive's north-west office and has been widely distributed throughout the NHS. Copies are available in the Library.

The Government are developing a new NHS charter which, among other things, will be looking for a proper balance between patients' rights and their responsibilities towards the NHS. This includes keeping appointments or informing the NHS if they are unable to do so.

Abortions

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average cost of a first trimester NHS abortion in England and Wales for each of the last five years. [12957]

Ms Jowell: Information on the costs of specific operations is not held centrally because of a number of factors including the many different types of operations, the variation in cost from hospital to hospital and the logistics of administering such a diverse range of data.

Charging Policy (Disabled People)

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of current charging policies on disabled people and carers; and if he will introduce national guidelines on charging. [13308]

Mr. Boateng: Under the current system whereby local authorities have complete discretion, there are considerable variations in local authority charging practices. We are looking at how this may be addressed both in the short-term and as part of a fundamental review of long-term care.

Hospitals (Cornwall)

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the statements made by the Minister of State in Torbay on 23 October 1997 in response to questions about the threatened closures and cuts in Cornwall's community hospitals represent Government policy; [13180]

(2) if it is his intention that Ministers who have expressed views on the merits of proposed closures and cuts in Cornwall's community hospital services should play any part in the approval process for these proposals. [13179]

Mr. Boateng: During media interviews on 23 October, my noble Friend the Minister of State made general points about the need to see improved community services to enable patients to be treated in their own homes, rather than in hospital. My noble Friend did not comment upon, or pass judgment on, the service review of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly health authority.

Dental Health (Children)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies his Department has evaluated relating to the level of plutonium in the teeth of children *(a)* in the Sellafield area and *(b)* elsewhere in the Untied Kingdom; what were the results of these surveys; and if he will make a statement. [13210]

Ms. Jowell: A study, jointly funded by the Department of Health, the Department of Trade and Industry and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Agency entitled "Variations in the concentration of plutonium, strontium-90 and total alpha-emitters in human teeth collected within the British Isles" was published in "The Science of the Total Environment 201 (1997) 235–243". Copies of the study have been placed in the Library.

The results of the study suggest that the Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant may contribute to the plutonium found in teeth in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. However the levels of plutonium measured were 1,000 times less than other radioactive substances also present in teeth from natural sources. The authors have acknowledged that the levels of plutonium were so low that they present an insignificant risk to health.

Trusts (Appointments)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) in which instance the final interviews for trust non-executive directors' posts in the North Thames region have been conducted during the appointment process for the new chairman of the trust, and before the Secretary of State made the appointment; [13204]

(2) when he made the appointment of the new chairman of the Basildon and Thurrock Hospital trust; and when the final interviews for non-executive directors for the Basildon and Thurrock Hospital trust were conducted. [13203]

Mr. Milburn: In the current round of appointments to national health service trusts in the North Thames region, there are vacancies for 24 chairmen and 91 non-executive directors. All these appointments are made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on the advice of the regional chairman. Given the time constraints for this year's trust exercise, it has not always been possible to involve new chairmen in shortlisting candidates for non-executive directors for their trusts. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote on 30 October inviting a candidate to accept the post of chairman of Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals NHS trust. The new chairman's views will be taken into account on who should fill the two non-executive posts at the trust which fall vacant on 1 December.

Late Payments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the suppliers to whom payments from NHS trusts are outstanding beyond the due date for payment, indicating in each case the name of the trust and when the payment was due. [13526]

Mr. Milburn: National health service trusts make over 3 million payments per quarter to a very large number of suppliers. The details are not therefore collected by the Department. In the first quarter of 1997–98, approximately 80 per cent. of payments were made on time.

Information on the compliance of individual NHS trusts with the public sector payment policy is collected quarterly. The information provides the numbers of bills paid, the numbers paid within the prompt payment target and the percentage paid within target.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the suppliers to his Department who are owed outstanding amounts, indicating the amounts and the due date on which the account should have been settled. [13542]

Ms Jowell: All Departments are required to pay all their bills within agreed contract terms, or 30 days from receipt of the goods or service or a valid invoice, whichever is later, where no such terms exist. Such detailed information on payment performance for the current financial year could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Treasury will shortly be publishing a league table of departmental payment performance for 1996–97.

Transplants

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how may *(a)* kidney, *(b)* heart, *(c)* lung, *(d)* heart–lung, *(e)* liver and *(f)* other transplants have been carried out in each of the last 10 years, broken down into health authority district; and if he will make a statement. [12906]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The information available on numbers of transplants has been placed in the Library. These show the numbers of transplants carried out for the last 10 years broken down by region. Many hospitals do not perform kidney transplants, and there are just eight designated cardiothoracic transplant units and six designated liver units in England. This is the main reason for the considerable variation in the numbers of transplants performed in different regions.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the Transport costs incurred by jobseeker's allowance claimants in rural areas in meeting the requirement regularly to sign on at their local jobcentre by virtue of their residence within four hours' travelling distance; and if he will make a statement. [13218]

Mr. Alan Howarth: We want as many jobseekers as possible to have regular access to jobcentre advice and services, to help them return to work as quickly possible. The great majority therefore attend each fortnight. However, a small minority sign by post instead, because of the distance they live from the jobcentre. Postal signing is normally agreed for anyone whose normal door-to-door journey to the jobcentre using public transport using public transport would take more than an hour in either direction, or would have to be away from home for more than four hours in total.

We have made no estimate of the costs incurred in fortnightly attendance at the jobcentre. Most people incur some costs, and it has never been the practice to refund them. Jobcentres can of course consider accommodating jobseekers' normal day of attendance to any weekday on which they may regularly travel to the town concerned.

Southampton University (Merger)

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what arrangements have been made to transfer the relevant assets from La Sainte Union college of higher education to the university of Southampton following the merger of the college with the university. [14239]

Dr. Howells: La Sainte Union college of higher education merged with university of Southampton on 1 September 1997. The congregation of La Sainte Union des Sacrés Coeurs owns the land and buildings used by the college. The congregation has agreed to sell the academic and associated buildings to the university and to grant the university an option to purchase the student residence at a later date. The estate has been partly financed by public funds and Government have an interest in ensuring that any disposals or transfers comply with requirements for propriety, regularity and value for money.

The Government have agreed that the Higher Education Funding Council for England may waive the standard condition in its financial memorandum with the college requiring it to repay the Government interest in the estate to the Exchequer when it is transferred to the university. In return, the university has agreed that the estate will continue to be used for higher education, and has accepted responsibility to repay the Government interest in the estate to the Exchequer if it is disposed of in the future.

TEC Efficiency Scrutiny

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's implementation report following the efficiency scrutiny into the training and enterprise company contract and management fee; and if he will make a statement. [14238]

Dr. Howells: A copy of the implementation report that his Department has produced in response to the findings of the above scrutiny has been placed in the Library.

The great majority of the scrutiny's 40 recommendations have been implemented in line with the agreed action plan. The overall result is a less bureaucratic and more productive relationship between his Department and TECs.

The Government will continue to seek ways to ensure that the cost of administering programmes is the minimum that is necessary, consistent with proper accountability for public funds.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the total additional budget allocation for grant-maintained schools in England, in addition to that which they received through their local management of schools funding allocation, for *(a)* 1989–90, *(b)* 1990–91, *(c)* 1991–92, *(d)* 1992–93 and *(e)* 1993–94. [13176]

Mr. Byers: For the years in question, the annual maintenance grant for grant-maintained schools consisted of three principal elements. The first—direct AMG—is what the GM school would have received under the local management of schools scheme of its former maintaining LEA. The second—meals AMG—consisted of an amount for school meals reflecting subsidy levels in the relevant LEA for net expenditure on school meals. The third—central AMG—is an amount for services which LEA schools received free of charge but for which GM schools assumed direct responsibility, and was a simple percentage of the first sum. The central percentage is determined by the Secretary of State and under current arrangements is calculated for individual local education authorities by reference to the financial returns that they make.

We recognise that the current arrangements for funding GM schools treat them differently from LEA schools, and can lead to unwarranted financial advantage to some GM schools. We are proposing in 1998–99 to move to a fairer funding system and we are presently considering the responses to consultation on our proposals. These proposals include transitional arrangements, where necessary, to minimise disruption to individual GM school budgets.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how he intends to deal with those students who fail to meet their repayments on tuition fees; what provision he has made for this; and if he will make a statement. [13160]

Dr. Howells: Universities and colleges will be responsible for collecting tuition fees from their students and for deciding what should happen in the case of students who fail to pay their fees, bearing in mind that their grants from the Higher Education Funding Council for England will assume this new source of income.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if all university students from throughout the United Kingdom will be charged a flat rate tuition fee of £3,000 for a degree level course. [13361]

Dr. Howells: Full-time undergraduate students will be required to contribute up to £1,000 a year towards tuition fees, depending on the assessment of parental or spouse's income. It will be possible for full-time undergraduate students from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to undertake a degree course for a maximum contribution of £3,000 to tuition fees, but students may opt for degree courses lasting longer than three years. In that case, the total level of contribution, depending on assessment of parental or spouse's income, will be higher, subject to the special arrangements which will apply to students on medical and dental courses in year five and beyond and to Scottish students taking four-year honours degrees, in recognition of the fact that many Scottish students will have spent only one year in the sixth form. No contributions will be required from students from low-income families.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has made to the Scottish Office in respect of university tuition fees for students from England and Wales. [13362]

Dr. Howells: We have asked the Scottish Office to encourage Scottish universities, where they do not do so already, to admit English and Welsh students with appropriate A-levels into the second year of their four-year honours degree courses, so that English and Welsh students will be able to obtain a Scottish honours degree for the same maximum contribution—£3,000—towards tuition fees as Scottish students. Students from low-income families will not, however, be required to contribute to fees.

Late Payments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the suppliers to his Department who are owed outstanding amounts, indicating the amounts and the due date on which the account should have been settled. [13547]

Dr. Howells: All Departments are required to pay all their bills within agreed contract terms, or 30 days from receipt of the goods or service or a valid invoice, which ever is later, where no such terms exist. Such detailed information on payment performance for the current financial year could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Treasury will shortly be publishing a league table of departmental payment performance for 1996–97.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Timeshare Industry

Mr. Levitt: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the regulation of the timeshare industry. [12757]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The timeshare industry in the United Kingdom is regulated by the Timeshare Act 1992, as amended by the Timeshare Regulations 1997, which implemented the EU timeshare directive. Member states were required to implement the directive by 29 April 1997. A number have not yet done so, including Spain where many UK citizens buy timeshares. I have written to the Spanish Government about this and will raise the matter when I meet the Spanish Consumer Minister later this month.

Minister's Unpublished Articles

Mr. Paterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list those articles written by the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), awaiting publication. [12542]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I have written a number of articles awaiting publication, in accordance with paragraphs 101, 102, 104–106 of the ministerial code: "A Code of Conduct and Guidance on Procedures for Ministers".

Inward Investors

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she is taking to establish a code of practice on the offering of state aids to inward investors; and when she expects to report to Parliament on this matter. [12977]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* As foreshadowed in the Scotland and Wales White Papers on devolution, common UK guidelines and consultation arrangements on financial assistance to industry will be set out in a published concordat, which is currently being prepared. I shall report to Parliament when that concordat is published.

Competition Policy

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will place in the Library copies of the responses to the draft Bill on competition policy. [12987]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Copies of the responses to the consultation document "A prohibition approach to anti-competitive agreements and abuse of a dominant position: draft bill" will be placed in the Library shortly with the exception of the responses from those respondents who have requested that their responses be kept confidential. Copies will also be placed in the library of the Department of Trade and Industry, which is open to the public. In the consultation document, we said it would be helpful to have responses by September 30. However, we said that responses received after that date would still be considered, and responses are accordingly still being received.

Used Car Sales

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action she proposes to take following the publication of the Office of Fair Trading report on the sale of used cars. [12989]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I have asked the Director General of Fair Trading to bring forward detailed proposals on the legislative changes he sees as necessary to implement the recommendations contained in his report.

Consumer Affairs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list her Department's priorities in relation to consumer affairs for the United Kingdom presidency of the EU. [12985]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: While preparations are well under way to conduct a successful presidency of the Consumer Council, with over a third of the Luxembourg presidency still to run, we have not finalised our plans. I am to pursue the Government's policy of ensuring that UK consumers achieve the best possible consumer protection.

Goods and Services (Payments)

Mr. Todd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list each of the functions relating to payment for goods or services supplied for which her Department is responsible indicating the management systems purchased, all sub-contractors involved in the work, co-operative arrangements with other Departments; and the costs of the systems and processes in the last year for which figures are available. [12572]

Mrs. Roche: In line with other Government Departments, the DTI is responsible for payments relating to the goods and services it procures. There are well-established procedures aimed at promoting efficient and effective procurement and prompt payment. In general, each management unit within the Department is responsible for purchases in relation to its own needs. The Department's central procurement standards unit formulates overall policy and disseminates best practice. Payments of invoices are contracted out to CSL Managed Services, which provides the Department's accounts services and similar services to a range of other public sector bodies. As procurement is an integral part of each management unit's activity, it is not possible to disaggregate the costs.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Redwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it is her policy to implement whatever recommendation the Low Pay Commission makes on the minimum wage. [13044]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 29 October 1997]:* The Government will decide the level at which the national minimum wage will be set after considering the Low Pay Commission's recommendations.

Export Licences

Caroline Flint: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the statistics on export licences issued and refused for the second half of 1996 will be placed in the Library. [14185]

Mrs. Roche: 1. It has been normal practice for statistics relating to decisions on applications for standard individual export licences for strategic goods to be placed periodically in the Library. However, a number of problems have been identified with the export control licence information processing system, ECLIPS, which came into operation in March 1995, on which details of such applications are recorded.

2. It should be made clear that the problems identified relate to the accuracy of recording and subsequent retrieval of information from the databases; they have not affected the processing of, and decision-making on, individual export licence applications. They fall into three main categories:

(i) In general, over the last few years, where a single application has involved a range of goods, only the major item of goods on the application has been recorded on ECLIPS, together with the entry in the legislation under which this item is controlled (known as the 'rating'). Any other goods on the application have been considered in the licensing process, but not recorded on the computer system.

(ii) Conversion and input errors have been found in data transferred to ECLIPS from earlier computer systems.

(iii) Errors and omissions have been found in the entry and updating of information on ECLIPS since it came into operation.

The House will be aware that it has been necessary in the past to correct a number of answers to questions, for example the question asked by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), *Official Report*, 13 June 1996 column *263*.

3. Data integrity problems also arise with the separately recorded data on applications for open individual export licences, on which information has not been included in the statistics placed in the Library.

4. Having identified these problems, this Government have taken urgent steps to improve the situation:

Checks have been made on all answers given to parliamentary questions since this Government took office;

New procedures have been put in place to ensure that all goods listed on export licence applications and their ratings will be recorded for all applications in future, and this work will be backdated to cover all applications on which a decision has been taken since 2 May;

> Data input procedures and their enforcement have been reviewed and strengthened;
>
> In order to assist industry and minimise input errors, work is in hand to allow companies to complete standard individual export licence applications electronically and it is hoped that this will be ready for testing in the new year; and
>
> In the same time scale, a new database is being developed to hold the data. All this work is being undertaken to a rigorous timetable and the result will be a significant advance on the present situation. However, some goods on an application may be listed under a range of different terms or even brand names.

While these can be searched by rating, comparison with a generic or specific description may be possible only in some cases by examining the original paper records.

5. As a result of checking answers given to parliamentary questions since this Government took office, three errors have now been identified affecting the answer to five separate questions; four asked by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and one by the hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber). Both have been informed by letter, copies of which have been placed in the Library of both Houses. Apart from this, however, as it is now clear that the databases do not provide a fully accurate record, some previous answers, using information obtained from the databases, could be proved wrong if recourse were made to the original paper records, of which there are some 280,000. In the light of this, all information given by this and previous Administrations—either in answer to parliamentary questions, or in correspondence, or elsewhere—relying on data obtained from these databases, should be read in conjunction with the following caveat:

> "This information is based on data retrieved from computer databases that have been found not to be fully comprehensive. It should therefore be treated as indicative only. For any single application involving a range of goods, all of the entries in the legislation under which all of these goods were controlled may not have been recorded. Additionally, there may have been errors and omissions in recording some information. The information could only be verified by undertaking a complete search of all paper records, which would entail excessive cost".

6. However, while it would not be cost-effective to seek to correct all the data available in the Library, the data for the second half of 1996 is being corrected by examination of the paper records. This work will be completed as soon as possible and the aim is to place in the Library before the end of the year statistics covering this period, albeit subject to the above caveat.

For the first time, these will include statistics on open individual export licences granted; copies of all current open general export licences will also be provided.

7. The Government are committed, in spirit of openness, to reporting annually on the state of strategic export controls and their application.

Late Payments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the suppliers to her Department who are owed outstanding amounts, indicating the amounts and the due date on which the account should have been settled. [13546]

Mrs. Roche: All Departments are required to pay all their bills within agreed contract terms, or 30 days from receipt of the goods or service or a valid invoice, whichever is the later, where no such terms exist. The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Government will publish a league table of departmental payment performance for 1996–97 shortly.

Export Credits (Indonesia)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the value of the export credits furnished to Indonesia in each of the last five years; and what percentage of these were allocated to defence exports. [12342]

Mrs. Roche: According to readily available information, figures show that the value of ECGD supported export credits to Indonesia in each of the past five years was as follows:

Year	*Total £ million*	*Per cent. attributable to defence*
1993	100.0	8
1994	232.9	47
1995	649.8	64
1996	337.0	43
1997 to date	56.9	2

NORTHERN IRELAND

Sex Offenders

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted under the Sex Offenders Act 1997 in relation to Northern Ireland. [12753]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* The Sex Offenders Act 1997 came into being on 1 September 1997 and to date no persons have been charged or convicted under the Act in Northern Ireland.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many sex offenders have registered their place of abode by category of offence. [12754]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 27 October 1997]:* A total of 49 persons in Northern Ireland have registered as required under current legislation. This figure is made up as follows:

	Number
Indecent assault on children	33
Indecent assault	7
Gross indecency	4
Rape	1
Attempted rape	1
Incest	1
Unlawful carnal knowledge	1
Taking indecent photographs	1

Drumcree Disturbances

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prosecutions of *(a)* members of the loyalist community and *(b)* members of the nationalist community have taken place in respect of the Drumcree disturbances. [12864]

Mr. Ingram: As a result of disturbances during the period 5 to 13 July 1997, 35 persons have been prosecuted. Of these police perceive 19 to come from the loyalist community and 16 to come from the nationalist community.

WALES

Voluntary Sector

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his proposals to promote and create partnerships between his Department and the voluntary sector, and for the allocation of funding to the voluntary sector in Wales. [12861]

Mr. Ron Davies: Officials are currently discussing with representatives of the voluntary sector the development of a compact between the Government and the voluntary sector in Wales. I expect this compact to set out the principles, including those relating to funding, which will govern our future relationship. We will consult on the final form which the compact should take.

Late Payment

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the suppliers to his Department who are owed outstanding amounts, indicating the amounts and the due date on which the account should have been settled. [13538]

Mr. Ron Davies: All Departments are required to pay all their bills within agreed contract terms, or 30 days from receipt of the goods or service or a valid invoice, whichever is later, where no such terms exist. Such detailed information on payment performance for the current financial year could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Treasury will shortly be publishing a league table of departmental payment performance for 1996–97.

Local Government Funding

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from local authorities in Wales concerning the negative impact of proposed changes in the distribution of financial support to local government in Wales with particular reference to the more economically deprived counties. [13360]

Mr. Ron Davies: In addition to comments and proposals on the distribution arrangements for the forthcoming revenue settlement from the Welsh Local Government Association, I have received representations from a number of individual local authorities. I discussed the arrangements with the association on 27 October. I will also be consulting Cardiff county council and Rhondda Cynon Taff county borough council on the options

I am considering a package of measures which will implement the proposed changes to the distribution formula whilst protecting individual authorities' spending power and limiting the impact on council tax payers. For the longer term, I propose to commission, jointly with the Welsh Local Government Association, an independent review of the concept of expenditure need and the main factors that influence it. This review should be completed in time for early consideration by the Welsh Assembly.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what resources he will make available to authorities that have been or are to be reorganised on 1 April 1995, 1996, 1997 or 1998 for reorganisation costs incurred by them in 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [14067]

Ms Armstrong: On 18 July I invited authorities that have been or are to be reorganised on or before 1 April 1998 to submit estimates of the amount of expenditure they expect to incur on transitional costs of reorganisation in 1997–98. On the basis, inter alia, of the information provided by the authorities, I have decided the revised maximum amounts that it would be appropriate to allocate towards such costs in 1997–98. In the initial round, priority was given to authorities that were reorganised on 1 April 1997 and will be reorganising on 1 April 1998; I have adopted the same priorities for the mid-year stage of the scheme. The majority of the authorities to be reorganised in 1998 requested at the beginning of the scheme that allocations in respect of redundancy be deferred until this round. Accordingly, the allocations listed below for authorities reorganising in 1998 are intended to cover redundancy costs.

The amounts are as follows:

Maximum amounts: £000s rounded

Authority	*1997–98*
1996 reorganisations	
Hartlepool borough council	1,400
Redcar and Cleveland council	1,300
Middlesbrough borough council	1,500
Stockton on Tees borough council	1,300
Bristol city council	1,100
Bath and North East Somerset council	1,700
North Somerset council	1,000
South Gloucestershire council	1,200
Kingston upon Hull council	1,200
East Riding Yorkshire council	2,500
North Lincolnshire council	1,200
North East Lincolnshire council	1,900
York city council	800
Total	18,100
1997 Reorganisations	
Bedfordshire county council	1,000
Luton borough council	3,500
Milton Keynes borough council	3,000
Derbyshire county council	650
Derby city council	2,950
Bournemouth borough council	2,900
Poole borough council	3,000

Maximum amounts: £000s rounded

Authority	*1997–98*
Durham county council	350
Darlington borough council	2,000
East Sussex county council	1,800
Brighton and Hove council	4,000
Hampshire county council	1,600
Portsmouth city council	2,600
Southampton city council	3,200
Leicestershire county council	1,100
Leicester city council	3,100
Rutland council	1,160
Staffordshire county council	720
Stoke on Trent city council	2,600
Wiltshire county council	400
Swindon borough council	2,000
Total	43,630
1998 Reorganisations	
Berkshire county council	4,100
Bracknell forest borough council	2,100
Newbury district council	2,400
Reading borough council	3,000
Slough borough council	2,600
Royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	2,200
Wokingham district council	3,500
Hereford and Worcester county council	2,300
Hereford city council	250
Leominster district council	350
Malvern Hills district council	600
South Herefordshire district council	200
County of Herefordshire district council (shadow)	[1]3,000
Worcestershire county council (shadow)	[1]2,300
Malvern Hills district council (shadow)	[1]385
Devon county council	3,000
Plymouth city council	2,900
Torbay borough council	3,400
Essex county council	2,800
Southend on sea borough council	2,950
Thurrock borough council	2,850
Nottinghamshire county council	2,400
Nottingham city council	3,100
Cheshire county council	2,500
Halton borough council	2,500
Warrington borough council	3,300
Shropshire county council	2,100
The Wrekin district council	3,000
Kent county council	3,200
Gillingham borough council	400
Rochester city council	600
Medway Towns council (shadow)	[1]3,000
Cambridgeshire county council	1,400
Peterborough city council	3,400
Lancashire county council	2,800
Blackburn with Darwen borough council	3,200
Blackpool borough council	3,000
Total	87,085
Combined total allocations	148,815

[1] Supplementary credit approval to be issued. The figure includes SCA issued in May 1997. Isle of Wight council, Buckinghamshire and Dorset county councils did not submit bids.

SCOTLAND

Land Ownership and Management

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how the Government plan to take forward their commitment to initiate a study of land ownership and management in Scotland. [14189]

Mr. Dewar: I am establishing a land reform policy group, under the chairmanship of my noble Friend the Scottish Office Minister for Agriculture, the Environment and Fisheries, which will have the following remit:

> to identify and assess proposals for land reform in rural Scotland taking account of their cost, legislative and administrative implications and their likely impact on the social and economic development of rural communities and on the natural heritage.

The group comprises senior officials from the Scottish Office and the Forestry Commission; and Professor John Bryden of Aberdeen university, who has long experience of land tenure issues, will act as external assessor. Over the next year the group will assess carefully the range of available options and I expect is report to provide a sound basis for early action by the new Scottish Parliament. Along with two related reports from the Scottish Law Commission on the abolition of feudal tenure and on reform of the law on real burdens, this should pave the way for early land reform legislation for the new millennium.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Crown Office has access to all the United States evidence relating to Lockerbie. [13212]

Mr. McLeish: As has been repeatedly stated, there has been very full co-operation throughout between the Scottish and United States authorities. Appropriate arrangements have been made for sharing of information and evidence and many inquiries have been pursued jointly or in parallel with those of the United States authorities.

Pupils with Medical Needs

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he proposes to issue guidance to social work departments on supporting pupils with medical needs. [13217]

Mr. Galbraith: There are no plans to issue such guidance to social work departments. However, my officials are currently discussing with directors of education in Scotland draft guidance on legal and administrative issues related to the administration of medicine in schools.

Travellers

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to extend the work of the advisory committee on Scotland's travelling people in Scotland beyond the end of 1997. [13221]

Mr. Chisholm: This is currently under consideration. My right hon. Friend expects to reach a decision shortly.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evidence the advisory committee on Scotland's travelling people in Scotland has received about the location and availability to travelling people of pitches within Highland council area. [13222]

Mr. Chisholm: The advisory committee receives information on pitches across Scotland from its own members and, from time to time, from a range of other sources. In May 1997, the Scottish Office published a report on "Local Authority Sites for Travellers" intended to assist the advisory committee in its work. The report included a survey of all local authority sites then open, including those in Highland council's area. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by airport the Scottish Office grant made available to Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [13220]

Mr. Chisholm: Scottish Office grant to Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. is not hypothecated in respect of individual airports. The amount of deficit subsidy attributed by HIAL to each airport operated by the company was as follows:

	1995–96 £	*1996–97* £
Barra	426,000	864,000
Benbecula	637,000	708,000
Campbeltown	899,000	856,000
Inverness	2,651,000	1,075,000
Islay	509,000	457,000
Kirkwall	2,722,000	926,000
Stornoway	430,000	408,000
Sumburgh (non-oil[1])	340,000	270,000
Tiree	510,000	388,000
Wick	741,000	1,052,000

[1] Sumburgh's oil-related activities are not subsidised and in the years in question made a positive contribution to HIAL's overall finances of £1,475,000 in 1995–96 and £367,000 in 1996–97.

Woodland Sales

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the areas of Forestry Commission woodland that are currently being advertised for sale and *(b)* the steps being taken to safeguard public access in these areas. [13413]

Mr. Chisholm: We imposed a moratorium on the sale of Forestry Commission land when we took up office. The commission and its selling agents therefore explain to anyone making inquiries about buying woodlands that there are currently no Forestry Commission woodlands available for purchase.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Montserrat

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what are her current plans for the development of Montserrat; and if she will make a statement. [13351]

Clare Short: We have always made clear that we are committed to maintaining a viable community in the north of the island as long as it is safe for people to live there. This assurance means that essential facilities including health care, education, utilities and internal and external communications will be available for Montserratians who wish to remain on the island.

As we have agreed with the Government of Montserrat, the next major step is the preparation and agreement—in consultation with the people of Montserrat—of a long-term sustainable development plan for the island to provide the level of services and infrastructure appropriate to the needs of the community. Work on the preparation of the SDP is now under way and is expected to be completed early in the new year.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what are her plans for the future of the Commonwealth Development Corporation; and if she will make a statement. [13352]

Clare Short: As the Prime Minister announced on 22 October, my intention is that the CDC should develop a new partnership with the private sector in order to increase the flow of investment into the least developed countries. This will require legislation to allow private investors to invest in the CDC. The Government will retain a substantial minority holding and a golden share and will continue to set a framework for the corporation's operations in order to preserve its developmental character and special skills.

Bananas

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what are the *(a)* current activities and *(b)* future plans for expenditure arising from the proposal of the Commission of the European Community for the creation of an Africa, Caribbean and Pacific diversification and development programme for banana producers in Latin America in document COM(92) 496 and any subsequent measure; and if she will list for each state concerned (i) the finance committed and already expended and for what purposes and (ii) the authorising body and budget lines in the Community Budget. [13412]

Clare Short: We understand the proposal of the Commission of the European Communities for a Council regulation—COM(92) 496—to introduce a diversification and development programme for certain banana-producing countries of Latin America in document COM(92) 496 was not taken forward. There are therefore no current activities or future plans for expenditure.

Late Payments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the suppliers to her Department who are owed outstanding amounts, indicating the amounts and the due date on which the account should have been settled. [13537]

Clare Short: All Departments are required to pay all their bills within agreed contract terms, or 30 days from receipt of the goods or service or a valid invoice, whichever is later, where no such terms exist. Such detailed information on payment performance for the current financial year could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Treasury will shortly be publishing a league table of departmental payment performance for 1996–97.

Kenya

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans her Department has to review its policy towards Kenya in respect of its human rights record. [12552]

Mr. Foulkes: My Department will be reviewing Britain's development assistance programmes, including that for Kenya, in the light of the White Paper on international development. Our future policies towards Kenya will take account of the Kenyan Government's commitment to poverty eradication, which will include respect of human rights and the rule of law.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Small Businesses

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how many regulations affecting small businesses have come into effect since 1 May; and if he will list them; [13482]

(2) how many regulations affecting small businesses have been abolished since 1 May; and if he will list them. [13483]

Dr. David Clark: This information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. We are committed to reducing the burden of unnecessary regulation, particularly on small business, and ensuring that regulation delivers benefits to ordinary citizens. As promised in our manifesto, we have established the new better regulation task force with half of its members with small business interests. The access business group led by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary is overseeing a range of projects with clear benefits to small business.

Late Payments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the suppliers to his Department who are owed outstanding amounts, indicating the amounts and the due date on which the account should have been settled. [13536]

Dr. David Clark: For this purpose, I have responsibility for the Cabinet Office, including the Prime Minister's Office and the Office of Public Service and its agencies and the Central Office of Information.

All Departments are required to pay their bills within agreed contract terms, or 30 days from recept of the goods or services or a valid invoice, whichever is the later, where no such terms exist. Such detailed information on payment performance for the current financial year could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Treasury will shortly be publishing a league table of departmental payment performance for 1996–97.

TREASURY

Welfare to Work

17. **Mr. Reed:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had about the implementation of his welfare-to-work strategy. [12665]

20. **Mr. Coaker:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with industry about his welfare-to-work strategy. [12668]

21. **Mrs. Heal:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with employers about his welfare-to-work strategy. [12669]

23. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with employers about his welfare-to-work strategy. [12671]

32. **Ms Kelly:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with business about his welfare-to-work strategy. [12680]

36. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with business about the implementation of his welfare-to-work strategy. [12684]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The participation of employers is crucial to the success of the welfare-to-work programme. Since I launched the welfare-to-work programme at a business breakfast at No. 11, the Government have had extensive contacts with a wide range of employers—nationally and locally; in small firms and large—and in every sector of the economy and every region of the country.

The response and good will has been extremely encouraging, Sainsbury's, Tesco, BT, Lloyds bank, Ford, Rover, Marks and Spencer, Unipart, WH Smith—and many others—are coming up with ways that they can help the new deal. They realise that helping young people move from welfare to work is in the interest of business as well as the young people themselves. It is only by helping to improve the skills and employability of our young people that we can address the long-standing weaknesses of our economy and allow businesses to thrive.

Foreign Income Dividends

18. **Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made regarding the consultation process on the budget proposals for the future of FIDs. [12666]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: In response to the invitation I announced in the Finance Bill Standing Committee on 22 July, we have received a number of representations on behalf of UK-owned companies and UK investment funds that obtain a high proportion of their profits from overseas. These representations are being carefully considered with a view to finding a way forward following the abolition of FIDs in 1999 in 1999 that balances the interests of the Exchequer with those of the companies involved.

Advance Corporation Tax

19. **Mr. Brake:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from

the London borough of Sutton concerning the effect of abolition of the advance corporation tax refund on local authorities. [12667]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The leader of the council of the London borough of Sutton wrote to the Government on 22 July about the impact of the loss of these tax credits to local authority pension funds. In my reply to him, I explained that the extent to which these changes affect local authority budgets will depend on the overall judgments made by the funds' actuaries as they undertake revaluations due from next year.

37. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total pension fund available at the age of 65 years to an individual currently aged 35 years who remains on average earnings throughout his working life as a result of his changes to ACT. [12685]

Dawn Primarolo: No estimate is available.

Single Currency

22. **Mr. Walter:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the consequences of British entry into the European single currency in 1999. [12670]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I have received a wide range of representations on the consequences of British entry into the European single currency.

Tax and National Insurance

25. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what actions he has taken against employers who deduct tax and national insurance contributions from their employees but fail to pass them on the Inland Revenue; and if he will make a statement. [12673]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue will take appropriate action to secure payment of unpaid pay-as-you-earn and associated national insurance contributions, commensurate with the amount outstanding and the period during which it remains unpaid. The decision on what enforcement action is appropriate is made in the light of the particular circumstances of each case.

The Inland Revenue publishes a code of practice on collection of amounts due from employers—code of practice 7—which is available from tax offices and explains the recovery action it will take and taxpayer's rights and obligations.

Public Investment Projects

26. **Mr. Quinn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in attracting private participation in public investment projects. [12674]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Implementation of the Bates review of the private finance initiative is streamlining the initiative, reducing costs to the public and private sectors and making such investment a much more attractive proposition. Recent major contracts, such as Dartford and Gravesham hospital and Clarendon school, provide real evidence of the benefits to be gained from public-private partnerships.

Securities and Investments Board

27. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board. [12675]

Mrs. Liddell: The Chancellor meets with the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board from time to time.

Bank of England

28. **Ms Kingham**: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the representations he has received on his reforms to the Bank of England. [12676]

Mr. Darling: The Bill that was published on 28 October will put on a statutory footing the important reforms to the Bank of England, which we announced in May. These reforms have been widely welcomed and will be a significant step towards reducing short-termism and putting decision making on the right basis to deliver the long-term growth and employment that is a major objective of our economic policy. The Bill also represents a major move toward creating the single regulator that will deliver more effective and efficient regulation for financial services.

Economic Stability

29. **Mr. Bill Michie**: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to ensure economic stability. [12677]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Mr. Cranston).

Sterling Exchange Rate

30. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current sterling exchange rate. [12678]

Mrs. Liddell: Sterling has fallen back in recent months and has been more stable. The Government want to see a stable and competitive pound over the medium term, consistent with the objective of price stability.

35. **Ms Stuart:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he intends to take to protect manufacturing industry in the west midlands from the adverse effects of the current sterling exchange rate. [12683]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government want a stable competitive pound over the medium term, consistent with the objective of price stability. Industry is best helped by Government preventing any return to the cycle of boom and bust, and to pursue sound, long-term macroeconomic policies.

Inflation

31. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest inflation forecast. [12679]

Mrs. Liddell: The July Budget forecast, published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", showed underlying retail price—RPI ex MIPs—inflation at 2½ per cent. in the fourth quarter of 1997, before edging up temporarily to 2¾ per cent. in both the second and fourth quarters of 1998.

VAT (Domestic Fuel)

33. **Gillian Merron:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his reduction in VAT on domestic fuel from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent. [12681]

Dawn Primarolo: The change to a 5 per cent. rate came into effect on 1 September, benefiting all households well in time for winter fuel bills. I have received a few representations on the implementation of the measure.

Small and Medium Enterprises

34. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the increase in capital allowances for SMEs which he announced in the Budget. [12682]

Dawn Primarolo: I have received representations from a range of individuals and business organisations, mainly those with a particular interest in the small businesses sector who welcomed the useful cash flow advantage and boost to investment this measure provides.

VAT Crime Prevention Devices

38. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the advantages of reducing or removing VAT on crime prevention devices when these are purchased by local crime prevention panels for fitting in the homes of pensioners at no cost to those pensioners. [12686]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are committed to reducing crime and creating safer communities through a wide range of strategies. EC law does not allow the introduction of new VAT zero rates, nor does the directive provide for a reduced rate to be introduced for purchases of crime prevention devices.

Private Health Insurance

39. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the public expenditure implications of the withdrawal of tax relief for private health insurance for pensioners. [12687]

Dawn Primarolo: No firm estimate is available of the public expenditure costs arising from the withdrawal of tax relief for private medical insurance for those aged over 60. This depends on the number of those affected who give up their policies. In the light of past experience, we believe that no more than a small proportion will give up their policies so that the public expenditure cost will be significantly lower than the full-year saving of £140 million. Details of the public expenditure element of that saving are given at paragraph 2A.6 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997".

Capital Gains Tax (Avoidance)

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to counter Jersey-based capital gains tax avoidance schemes. [12661]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The Chancellor said in his Budget Statement that he had asked the Inland Revenue to review all areas of tax avoidance. Specific measures arising from that review will be announced as necessary.

Environment (Tax Incentives)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce tax *(a)* incentives and *(b)* disincentives to encourage good environmental practice. [12672]

Dawn Primarolo: On Budget day in July we issued a statement of intent on the use of environmental taxes, which said that we will aim to reform the tax system to increase incentives to reduce environmental damage. We also outline, specific areas where we were taking this forward.

Aviation Fuel

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to tax aviation fuel. [12656]

Dawn Primarolo: We have no plan to tax aviation fuel at present.

Consultation Paper

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish the consultative paper foreshadowed in paragraph 1.30 of the July 1997 "Financial Statement and Budget Report"; and if he will make a statement. [14156]

Mr. Gordon Brown: It will be published on Tuesday 25 November.

Its purpose will be to begin a national debate on major economic issues in advance of the spring 1998 Budget and to report on the state of the economy including the forecast for the coming year.

The analysis in the paper will form the Background to the policy measures to be announced in the Spring Budget.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which other reviews have been set up as part of the comprehensive spending review since the Chief Secretary's answer on 24 July; and if he will make the terms of reference available. [14157]

Mr. Darling: Five further reviews have been set up. They are departmental spending reviews of the Crown Office (Scotland) and the Northern Ireland criminal justice system and cross-departmental reviews of the intelligence agencies, provision for young children and illegal drugs. The terms of reference have been placed in the Library today.

The collected set of terms of reference also includes a correct copy of those for the review of the criminal justice system. I regret that an incorrect early draft of the terms of reference was mistakenly included in the set deposited in the Library on 24 July. The changes are highlighted in italics.

These additional reviews underline the commitment of the Government to look at all items of public spending and produce spending plans for the long term. In particular, the cross-departmental reviews announced today further reinforce the commitment to a truly comprehensive review throughout all parts of government and across traditional departmental boundaries.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 299**

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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